

SIR LIMPIDUS

by

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CHAPTER I

SIR LIMPIDUS was born at Clearfount Abbey in the sixties—the Age of Comparative Innocence—before the grimy engineer and his inventions had undermined the dwellings of the sons of light and forced them to bestir their wits in self-defence.

Clearfount Abbey with its outbuildings covers five acres of good English ground, and with its park it occupies five hundred acres. Its gardens, edged with yew and laid out in ingenious figures by a host of gardeners, would be a public spectacle if any member of the public were allowed to see them. Its pineries, vineries, melon-houses, and conservatories have always been maintained in perfect order and, it is said, will bear comparison with any institutions of the kind in any country. The artificial lake before the mansion is well stocked with fish which no one of the household cares to bring to land; and in a boat-house in a tuft of willows rest three skiffs with yellow sculls which no one of the household cares to use. The vistas of the park, the dells, the shapely coppices would captivate the eye of any artist; but no artist ever sees them save such daughters of the house and lady visitors as now and then may have essayed a water-colour drawing. For all this vast domain, with all that it contains, is strictly private. Of all its beauties, sacred privacy alone is valued by the owners. Two stalwart keepers are employed solely to keep marauders from the lake, to which adventurous village

boys are drawn at night by legends of huge fish which swim there, undisturbed for centuries. The owners of the Abbey are delightful people, kind to the poor and hospitable to the rich. But there is one thing that they cannot tolerate, and that is trespass; the least intrusion on their sacred privacy, seen or unseen, whether by night or day. This they regard as base ingratitude, and punish with the utmost rigour of the law.

Sir Rusticus, the father of Sir Limpidus, was a good landlord. His farms and cottages were kept in excellent repair. He made allowance for bad years and individual drawbacks, took an interest in the improvement of all breeds of livestock, and knew his tenantry and servants both by sight and name. There was on the estate a row of comfortable almshouses, each with its plot of garden, to which old labourers and wives of labourers retired to end their days. Sir Rusticus was wont to boast that no old man or woman on his property was a charge upon the rates. Yet he paid heavy rates, acquiring thus a double sense of merit and of grievance.

But all these things were subsidiary in his thinking to the real purpose of a great estate, which was to furnish sport to the possessor and his bidden friends. The crops upon the farms were not alone for profit to the farmers; they were also for the recreation and refreshment of the landlord's pheasants, hares, and partridges; and the district was patrolled by keepers day and night, to see that these more valued creatures had their way. Foxes, too, were to be venerated by the tenants, and spared to run before the Clearfount hounds.

This was indeed the foible of Sir Rusticus and his

associates; they looked on England as a vast preserve for game which they would shoot in season, a vast champaign adorned with seemly obstacles to give them pleasure and the spice of danger when they rode to hounds; with black, uncharted spaces which had been destroyed by industry, with here and there a point beflagged which was a race-course, and one great purple spot upon it, which was Town. The exercise their sports afforded kept them healthy, while the discussions they induced preserved their brains from rust, and made them earnest in the work of managing estates, which otherwise they might have counted drudgery. These English sports had made them what they were, and what they were they purposed to remain. For this unselfish end they entered Parliament and manfully endured no end of dull irrelevancies. For this they sat upon the Bench at Quarter Sessions, subscribed to charities, and went to Church, maintaining their position in the land. And every poacher, jockey, bookmaker, and idle varlet, as well as all the flunkies in the kingdom, praised them.

The church at Clearfount was in the park, close to the house, but far from Clearfount village. The village people seldom came there, although a right of way for them to do so was carefully demarked. The church at Curley being nearer by a mile for most of them, they went there when they felt the need to hear the parson's drone. The church at Clearfount thus became a kind of private chapel of the Abbey. The hatchments and memorial tablets to the family, its only ornaments, almost destroyed its use for other worshippers, who, wheresoever they might turn their eyes, were sure to be confronted with the virtues and achievements of some

Fitz-Beare or Turnicote deceased. But the fine Elizabethan altar-tomb up in the chancel, on which the evening sunlight played in summer, restoring the lost colour to its carven figures, belonged to a more ancient race, the Fenns, to which the Abbey had been granted at the dissolution of the monasteries. For the Fitz-Beares (who intermarried with the Turnicotes) had not been domiciled at Clearfount quite a century. The coat of arms on the Jacobean portico was never theirs. Their arms were only to be seen upon the gateway of the stables built by Sir Bucolicus, the second of the race. The first had been Sir Lupus, a distinguished lawyer of the Georgian age, whose patronymic was originally Jones.

Into this plumed, preserved, exclusive world, Sir Limpidus was born one April day—a cause of much rejoicing, though he knew it not. When the news of his arrival spread to Clearfount village and other villages which owned the yoke of the Fitz-Beares, it caused excitement; and, when evening came, a crowd of labourers headed by some more important tenants tramped up the drive to the great door, cheered themselves hoarse, and threw their hats into the air. The leaders were admitted to an audience of Sir Rusticus, to whom they offered their congratulations in a sheep-faced, hearty way, as men who would have mentioned, if they dared, that joy makes brothers. Sir Rusticus received their homage kindly, and then, at their request, went out beneath the portico and thus addressed the crowd, after loud calls for silence :—

‘My friends—for friends we are on such a day—your kindly thought in coming here assures me of it. My

friends, I thank you from the bottom of my heart for your congratulations and—er—good wishes. As you know, a great event has happened in this house. I have now a son who, if he lives—as, please God, he will—longer than I do, will be the owner of Clearfount and my other property. I've always tried to do my duty by the place and every man who lives on it or is employed by me—cries of 'So yow hev, sir!' 'That's the trewth!' and 'Hee-ah! Hee-ah!'—'and my hope is that my son will do the same. At any rate, I promise—if God spares my life—to do my best to see that he is brought up in the good old English way—to ride straight, shoot straight and walk straight. We'll have no crookedness. May God grant him a long and useful life, and may he be a better man than his father.' Here the voice of Sir Rusticus failed him for a moment through emotion. There were cheers. Then he resumed: 'My butler, I may tell you, has been brewing all to-day, and that particular brew will be put by in hogsheads for twenty-one years, to be drunk by you and me and him and all of us on the day my son comes of age. But I'm not going to ask you to wait all those years for a drink. That would be to throw a gloom on this joyful occasion. You must be thirsty after your long walk and all that cheering for which I thank you not only for myself, but for her ladyship, and also for one who cannot yet speak a word for himself, although he has a voice, I can assure you. I invite you all to go round to the servants' hall and drink a glass or two to my son's health.'

This speech, which had been carefully prepared beforehand, with assistance from the butler, roused enthusiasm. It was delivered from the steps at six o'clock, but it was

half-past ten before the last of the enthusiasts—a village constable—forsook the servants' hall and reeled away. Upon the following day some country neighbours—none of whom lived less than seven miles away—came in their carriages 'to inquire'; and an address was presented to the happy father by the tenantry, another by the tradesmen of the market-town, and yet another by the Great Black Pig Society.

CHAPTER II

IN these surroundings Limpidus awoke to consciousness, staying at Clearfount while his parents visited their house in London, or their house in Scotland, or their house in Kent. When he was carried through the gardens in a nursemaid's arms, the outdoor servants touched their foreheads to him. When he could run about and speak intelligibly, the members of the household strove to win his favour. His mother had been always delicate. When Limpidus was two years old she gave birth to a girl, and after that became a guarded invalid, unable to support the presence of her children for more than a few minutes at a time. Sir Rusticus was much too busy to attend to him, and so the infant education of the heir was left to servants under the reverent supervision of two maiden aunts who lived three miles away at Little Tupton.

These ladies guided his first footsteps in religion. His nurse had taught him the Lord's Prayer and an attractive jingle which he mumbled kneeling on his bed each night and morning; but it was his aunts who tried to make him understand by showing him the coloured pictures in a curious Bible. His interest was all that they could wish, although his questions were at times embarrassing.

'Aunt Rose, is God—um—what you'd call a gentleman?'

'Did Jesus have a pony like my daddy's promised me?'

'Didn't he have no Nanny and no Jane?' (Jane was the under-nurse.)

'Why did his mother carry him about? Was she a lady? Were they hard-up?'

His curiosity about the social status of the Holy Family half-scandalised and half amused the ladies, who were sometimes puzzled how to satisfy his craving for the truth without destroying veneration at the very outset. Miss Rose, who had clear wits, bethought her that the Saviour was of royal birth, and told him so.

'What did he want to work for in that dirty place? I wouldn't if I was a prince,' was his next question, suggested by a picture of the carpenter's shop. Miss Ursula rebuked him in a tone of awe. Miss Rose Fitz-Bear explained that it was customary with the Jews for every man, no matter what his rank, to learn a trade.

'I wouldn't,' answered Limpidus decidedly.

'Little boys have to do what they are told,' observed Miss Ursula.

'My darling Limpidus, if it was the thing for gentlemen to work as carpenters, you'd have to do it or you'd cease to be a gentleman,' remarked Miss Rose with her infectious laugh. 'It's not done nowadays but, if it were, you'd have to do it.'

'Same as everybody. S'pose I should,' said Limpidus, convinced, though still bewildered.

'Besides, in old days people used to work more than they do now that things are well arranged.'

Limpidus was silenced; but still the puzzle of the carpenter of royal birth continued to perplex his secret thoughts.

At the far end of the village street at Clearfount was a wheelwright's yard, approached through crazy wooden

gates which always stood wide open, being choked with nettles. One autumn day, when he was six years old, Limpidus dragged his attendant nursemaids, the perambulator, and his little sister through those gates up to a shed in that yard where a boy, in a paper cap and a thick apron, with bare arms, was busy planing a great plank of deal. Then he refused to move. He watched the work, trying to reconcile the picture which that youth presented with his own notion of important people. Thin flaxen shavings flew from off the board, just like the ringlets on the head of Agatha. He was standing thus, absorbed in speculations, deaf to his nurse's plea that it was time to go, when a boy of his own age came out of a cottage door and crossed the yard towards them. Sir Limpidus surveyed this child with deep disgust. Its nose and all around its mouth was dirty.

'You'd better wash your face,' he said severely.

That child of sin set out its tongue at him.

'You're very rude,' said Limpidus. 'I'll tell my father.'

And then he hardly knew what happened, he was so amazed. His dirty-faced insulter gave a whoop and, with a hideous grimace, put down his head and charged. Limpidus was overthrown among the sawdust. The two nurses screamed, and so did little Agatha.

Limpidus was rescued, set upon his feet and dusted by the wheelwright and his assistant, who hissed as grooms do when they use the curry-comb, and uttered such emollient remarks as, 'No bones broke, not this time.' 'There now, little master!' and 'Wait till I cotch hold o' yow, ye naughty boy!' Half blind with indignation, Limpidus could still perceive his enemy, afar off, doing a triumphant war-dance. His thoughts were all of

vèngeance. The next time he met that devil he would kill him. But when he told Aunt Rose of his intention, she put him off, assuring him that it was never done. No gentleman could stoop to fight a person of that class.

Sir Rusticus, meanwhile, who heard the tale of the assault in aggravated form from the lips of the head-nurse, had taken steps to punish the assailant. He sent a message to the wheelwright and his wife who were apologetic, but not to the extent which he considered due. They refused to bring their son up to the Abbey to bow the knee to Master Limpidus in person.

'A strange piece of obstinacy,' he remarked at dinner, 'and one which may prove costly to poor Eade, for I shall not renew his lease when it expires, since he is disobliging.'

There was another aunt of Limpidus beside the two already named, who happened to be present upon this occasion. She had been early married to a man of wealth and of the highest fashion. She moved in no restricted sphere, and often showed impatience of the ways of Clearfount when visiting that haven of her childhood.

She argued warmly with Sir Rusticus against his purpose, seeming to think it wrong that he should speak about the wheelwright before Limpidus, who, for a treat, had been allowed to come down to dessert that evening.

'I shouldn't take the slightest notice of a quarrel between children. You'll make the boy a horrid little sneak and prig. Send him to school as soon as possible, and let him find his level.'

Limpidus, all ears, took note of all her words.

'What is a sneakin' prig?' he asked his Aunt Rose next morning, when she came into the nursery.

'A sneak is one who tells tales out of school. A prig—I can't quite tell you what that is.'

Dissatisfied with this reply, Limpidus took his courage in both hands and went and put his questions to that much more terrifying and imposing aunt who had let fall the epithets.

'A sneak,' she told him, seizing both his shoulders and forcing him to face her squarely, 'is a horrid little boy who can't fight his own battles, but goes whining to his daddy if a baby hits him. And a prig is a namby-pamby, bread-and-butter creature who thinks that everything he does is right.'

'That isn't me,' said Limpidus, defiant.

'It will be if you don't look out.'

'About that wheelwright's boy?'

'He's the same size as you are. If you couldn't punish him yourself you shouldn't appeal to grown-ups.'

'I'll go this afternoon and hit him hard.'

'Suppose he hits you harder?'

Limpidus was struck by that suggestion. She went on:—

'It is unwise to attack a boy you want to punish, unless you feel quite sure that you can give it him.'

Limpidus drank in the wisdom open-mouthed.

'Now, what ought you to do?' his aunt demanded.

'Think for yourself—The boy is not your equal. He was naughty and ill-mannered. I dare say you were not polite to him. But it seems a little hard that he should never hear the last of it, and that his people should be turned out of their home on that account.'

'I'll ask my daddy not to turn them out.'

'That's better,' said his aunt, but quite without enthusiasm. 'Remember not to sneak another time.'

It isn't done by people whom one trusts and likes. You'll soon learn better when you go to school.'

This incident concluded all association of Nazareth with Clearfount in the mind of Limpidus. It also gave him his first intimation that there are malignant and rebellious creatures in the world. The face of that grimacing, red-tongued boy remained with him through life, symbolic of a nation's danger.

CHAPTER III

WHEN Limpidus was seven years old he had a governess who taught him how to read and write and cipher in a large round hand. When he attained the age of nine he went away to school, to the establishment of the Rev. Mr Smiles, a spruce and courtly clergyman with well-oiled hair, who received a limited number of the sons of noblemen and superior gentry for instruction in his home. In appearance Mr Smiles was like a sandy cat of perfect manners. In the presence of a parent he would always purr; but the boys, his mice, beheld in him a beast of prey. They loathed him for his spying and the way he spoilt their games by supervision, his making them wear gloves and keep to ranks when walking in the town, but especially for what they called his 'ghastly cheek.' He seemed to think that having birched so many children of good birth conferred on him a patent of nobility. He gave himself no end of airs. He was, in short, a beast. His wife, upon the other hand, was reckoned 'decent,' and his daughter 'ripping.' Limpidus knew bright days in his establishment, but they were few. One of the assistant masters was a perfect brick. The boys had fun among themselves, for ever planning humiliations for the Rev. Mr Smiles in after life. Some of those boys endeared themselves to Limpidus, and when the time came he was sad at parting from them. One day, in his last term, Limpidus and two other blue-eyed fresh-complexioned little men were shepherded by

Mr Smiles to a great public school, there to undergo examination in some elementary subjects. After walking from a railway station up a street alive with boys, Limpidus found himself in a huge, cool room with oriel windows which had many coats of arms in coloured glass set in their upper panes. He was seated at a desk, like fifty other little boys, with pen and ink and blotting-paper, a supply of foolscap, and a list of questions laid before him. His two companions were a long way off. Two black-gowned, mortar-boarded masters sauntered to and fro, or talked in whispers at a table in the middle of the room. When Limpidus looked up from his paper, he beheld a lot of names carved in gold letters upon boards high up between the windows. Some of them were famous in his country's history. Small though he felt, this was the road to greatness.

Released at length, he went out with the others, comparing notes about the difficulty of the questions, to find the Rev. Mr Smiles awaiting him. Having collected his three charges, that smooth cleric took them to a pastry-cook's for sandwiches and lemonade; where they were intimidated by the crush of older boys in a peculiar dress who shouted their commands like men, and never noticed them. Just thus do new recruits survey the regiment in which they come one day to take delight; just thus do shivering learners view the deep end of the swimming-bath.

They had to return and do another paper, and this time their preceptor let them find their way alone to the examination room, because, he said, he had to go and lunch with an old friend of his, the second master of that ancient school.

'The utter beast !' said Limpidus, when they were rid

of him. 'He's given us a measly lunch of sandwiches, and now he's going to gorge. I bet he'll charge our people for champagne and oysters in the bill.'

'He is a swine,' the other two agreed.

At four o'clock, when they came out again from the examination, the Rev. Mr Smiles was waiting for them as before. He took them to the pastrycook's again for tea. Then they went to the schoolyard to hear a master read the names of the successful candidates. A little crowd of members of the ancient school had gathered out of curiosity. Their faces wore a critical and bored expression which seemed to Limpidus the height of manliness. Fitz-Beare had passed; so had his two companions. The Rev. Mr Smiles called them good boys and said they were a credit to Leander House. It was with a pride, till then unknown, that Limpidus, in the post office, wrote with his own hand a telegram announcing his success.

That telegram caused joy at Clearfount Abbey. Sir Rusticus put on his hat and walked a mile and a half to the rectory to tell the rector, who had coached young Limpidus in Greek and Latin in the previous holidays; then on, another mile and a half, to tell the aunts. His wife, when informed of the glad news, was overcome in her weak state, and nearly fainted. The village people heard of the event and offered their congratulations with extensive grins and fervent forehead-rapping when they met the squire, who replied alike to all and sundry: 'My son is not a fool, I knew he'd pass.'

And so he might have known, yet felt no pleasure, for Limpidus from birth had had his name down for the best 'house,' and no one with that qualification had ever been refused admission to the ancient school. The ordeal by

examination was a new device to keep out undesirables of divers kinds. No boy of the lofty rank of a Fitz-Beare, or with the wealth which nowadays amounts to station, unless a slavering idiot, could have failed to pass it. But Sir Rusticus considered that his son had scored a wonderful success. All these examinations were things new to him, and he supposed that they were all competitive. Though he regarded them as an affront to persons in his rank of life, he none the less was pleased to know his son could pass them.

When Limpidus came home, his father spoke to him as to an equal and a friend, as if he had been through some process of initiation; making the youngster feel himself a man already, too big to join in play with little Agatha, as he had been glad to do in former holidays. One evening the father and son were returning from a ride round the estate. It was a lovely August evening, amber-hued, and Clearfount Abbey, set in stately trees and mirrored in its lake, was an impressive sight. Sir Rusticus reined in his horse, pointed to the mansion with his hunting-crop and spoke as follows :—

‘I can’t expect to live for ever, my boy, and when I die all this that we have seen to-day, as well as Bannock Forest and the Kentish property, will be yours. A pretty good inheritance ! Now, all our people so far have been decent, careful folk. Down from Sir Lupus, every owner has improved the property. We’ve married sensibly; we’ve done our duty by the land without shirking. We’ve kept clear of reckless gambling and that kind of vice which brings a man to ruin and degrades him. We’ve never borrowed, and we’ve seldom lent, and yet we’ve had our fling occasionally. Indeed, you might say we’ve been men of pleasure in a proper sense—what I

call reasonable men. Nothing violent or eccentric. I wish that you, my son and heir, may be the same. That's why I send you to the old school where I and your grandfather went before you. In some respects, it's a hard training, but it makes us what we are. Some characters are broken by it. But I don't fear that for you. Take everything in good part; do as you see others of your age and standing do, and you'll soon find your feet. Then look about you and make choice of friends. The friends one makes at school last all through life. They stamp a man.

'You'll find the life a rough-and-tumble just at first, but it is real life, and prepares you for the larger world. It takes the corners off a man and forms him on the proper pattern for an Englishman of our condition, who doesn't want to be stared at in the streets of London. A fellow who has not been through it is handicapped in life; especially one who has been brought up among women who give too much importance to religion, and all kinds of fads. You'll find out what is done by people of your sort, and learn to do it naturally. You'll learn to put religion, art, learning, and literature, and all such matters in their proper place, and not attach too much importance to 'em. At the same time you'll learn to tolerate a lot of things which your mother and your aunts, and women generally, condemn wholesale. You'll learn to keep your mouth shut about some things. I don't care whether you're a scholar or a dunce—though a gentleman should have some little knowledge in his head. What I hope is that you'll turn out a man capable of holding your own among men, and maintaining your position against all assaults. That's why I'm sending you to the old school. It will teach you your position with regard to others.

'Many famous men have been there, and hosts of decent people like ourselves. If you have ambition—and I don't see why you shouldn't, for a fellow with your prospects can aspire to anything—the old school with its memories will help you. At least, I hope you'll prove as decent as your forbears.'

Sir Rusticus stopped speaking; they had reached the house. He dismounted, throwing his bridle to a groom who had been waiting. Limpidus was down already, and they went indoors together.

'I'll do my best,' said Limpidus in tones of awe.

'Then I'm content, for no one can do more,' replied his father.

It was in the mood of high resolve engendered by his father's speech that Limpidus set off for the great public school, with two portmanteaux filled with a complete new outfit which had been purchased in most strict accordance with the housemaster's instructions. But he felt exceedingly forlorn and wretched as he was driven from the railway station to his new abode, and faced the bold and curious stare of older boys, a group of whom were lounging in the doorway as the cab pulled up.

'Lord! here's another!' cried a languid youth. 'Oh, Buttocks, come and look at this—a perfect darling!'

As Limpidus stood wondering what next to do, a great lump in his throat precluding speech, they crowded round him. One cried: 'What is this?' Another bade him go and get another face, and yet another seemed to take him for a girl, and made atrocious overtures. The language used was that of troopers or bargees mixed up with a peculiar jargon. The names of God and Christ

were used facetiously, with horrid epithets. Limpidus went crimson, for never had his childish ears been thus assailed with filth and blasphemy.

'Lend me your hanky, Satan. Let me wipe his mouth. His mammy's milk is still upon his lips!' cried out the chief tormentor.

'Poor little devil! Let him find his feet,' replied the youth called Satan, who appeared more human than the rest. 'Look here, young—— What's your name?'

'Limpidus Fitz-Bear.'

'Oh, Lord! Oh, la-di-dah! We can't have that. Young Limpet I shall call you, but don't stick. Limpet, you benighted little fool, the first thing that you've got to do is to see the Rotter and report yourself. You ought by rights to go to Rotter's private door, but, as you've come to ours, you may as well go through. Here Stinker! take this child to the Sublime Porte. Knock reverently, and announce his coming to the Rotter.'

Limpidus was led by a small fair-haired boy, nothing in whose appearance justified so foul a nickname, along bare passages to a dividing door. Here the guide stopped and pointed, saying:—

'Through there, first on right. Knock three times loudly.'

Then he vanished.

Limpidus supposed he was to knock upon the door before him. He did so, and continued doing so at intervals for half an hour, wondering what would become of his portmanteaux, whether they would be opened and his clothes abstracted by Satan, Stinker, and the other bandits. He even cried a little in his utter loneliness. At last, when he had knocked for the two hundredth time, the door was opened to him by a charming lady,

who called him 'You poor thing!' and asked how long he had been there, and what he wanted.

'I am Limpidus Fitz-Beare, and I was told that I must see a man named Rotter.'

The lady laughed outright. She cried: 'Those wicked boys! It's Mr Rotherham, my husband, you have got to see. Come on, I'll show you the way.'

Her kindness overcame poor Limpidus, making him think of home, his mother, his good aunts, and Agatha, and all the servants. He thus appeared to disadvantage in the presence of the housemaster who, however, proved to be in no way formidable. Mr Rotherham adjured him to cheer up, and readily endorsed his wife's decision that the poor little sobbing waif must stay to tea. He asked after Sir Rusticus and all the family, and patted Limpidus upon the back encouragingly.

When Limpidus at length went back into the boys' part of the house, it was in the company of Mr Rotherham himself, who, after explaining to him the topography of the whole building, showed him the room he was to occupy with two companions. He was relieved to find his things already there.

'Always come and ask me if you are in a difficulty,' said Mr Rotherham as he retired. 'You'll soon get used to things and feel at home, Fitz-Beare. It's strange at first.'

One of the tenants of his room was Stinker, his late guide.

'You'll get killed if you do, and you'll jolly well deserve it!'

'Do what?' asked Limpidus in great alarm.

'Go sneaking to the Rotter if you're in a difficulty!' said Stinker, mimicking the master's voice. 'It's hours

since I told you where to go. What the hell have you been doing all this time?’

‘I kept on knocking at the door—about an hour, I think—till Mrs Rotherham came and found me standing there and asked me what I wanted. I said I had been told that I must see a man called Rotter, and she laughed and then I knew I’d put my foot in it. But they were decent and made me stay to tea.’

‘You called him Rotter to her face, you — little fool,’ cried Stinker, glaring at him with a kind of awe. ‘Oh, what a filthy little ass you are! Don’t look at me like that or I’ll half kill you!’

He went into the corridor and called aloud: ‘Come hither, all who love a merry jest!’ and presently the room was full of boys of various sizes sitting in inquisition upon Limpidus—literally sitting on him in the case of three of them. He was called ass, fool, and worse, with various adjectives, and made to give a full account of everything the Rotter and his wife had said and done while he was with them. He heard insulting names applied to Mrs Rotherham with jests on her fecundity and Rotter’s love. He was threatened with complete destruction if he ever again went into their private house unless for punishment. ‘Because if we go poking into his part of the house, he’ll think he has the right to prowling round here’—a reason which to Limpidus seemed passing strange. And then, after he had been thrown from hand to hand awhile and kicked a little, but not viciously, the crowd went out and he was able to unpack his things, the best of which were grabbed immediately by Stinker, saying:—

‘New boys always have to pay their footing, you know!’

Blasphemy, foul language, brutality, petty larceny—surely these were not included in the system which his father had so warmly praised, surely these were no part of the making of an English gentleman! These boys were surely of a rougher class, a baser birth. It was a week before he learned that Stinker's real name was Lord Edward Walker, and that Satan was the Earl of Campsea Ash.

CHAPTER IV

WHEN Limpidus became a member of the famous school, he had a conscience formed upon the Christian plan. By the end of the first term that conscience was much battered; by the end of his first year it was completely broken. For long he was ashamed in lonely moments of his sins and lapses, as well as the indignities to which he every day submitted; but, seeing that no other boy resisted—indeed, what small boy could resist effectually when appeal to the authorities was counted treachery and punished with most awful tortures?—he derived some comfort from the sense that he was not exceptional. Just so, by wise provision of the early sultans, were Christian children taken from their parents and forcibly converted to another faith, to form a stalwart guard for the existing order, free from all mawkish sentiment and human ties. But the parents of the Janissaries, it is said, objected. The parents of young Limpidus and his compeers disbursed large sums of money in order that their sons might undergo that special treatment.

The actual school fees were not great, but before the parent could secure the privilege of paying them, it was necessary for the son to be a boarder in some master's house. The charge for this was ninety pounds a year, or a hundred and twenty pounds a year, according to the house. For that annual sum the boy was welcome to a room, which he and those who shared it with him

furnished at their proper charges, and to one meat meal a day. Beyond mere bread and butter the boys provided their own breakfast, tea, and supper; and it was the custom, amounting to a rule, for parents to deposit money at a cook-shop for that purpose every term. In addition, there were half a dozen different outfits in the way of dress, which had to be procured at certain shops and for a certain price, subscriptions, tips to servants, all obligatory. It had been computed by a speculative local tradesman that each member of the school brought not a penny less than four hundred pounds a year into the town.

A foreigner on hearing this, might well conjecture that the learning there to be acquired was of the highest order. It may have been, but few boys troubled to acquire it, and none, we may suppose, were sent there for that purpose, since better teaching could be had in cheaper schools. Some luckless ones there were, the holders of scholarships, who worked perforce because their wealth and birth were insufficient to enable them to cut a figure in the world without the aid of university degrees, or such distinction as can be gained in Civil Service examinations. But they were disregarded. It was for the rough-and-tumble life, the fun, the hardship, the indelicacy, the rubbing off of eccentricities, that the nobility and gentry sent their sons there; and the snobs sent their sons to meet the sons of the nobility and gentry, to acquire their tone and to become like them the guard of the existing order, free of its court and eligible for its honours.

Limpidus was obliged to lag for older boys and, if he did the slightest thing amiss, got kicked and cuffed and blamed in terms of quite unpardonable insult. He was

made to understand that he was nobody. He had to treat a boy who had been two years in the school as his social superior; he had to serve an athlete or a sixth form boy as he would serve his God. The slightest trace of 'swagger' found in his demeanour was punished in a cruel manner with the cane. He was subjected to the greatest insult manhood can endure and, unaware that most of England's moralists, her judges, prelates, statesmen, and philosophers have borne the same indignity at school, felt outraged and defiled. There were some things which his father did not know, he felt assured, or he would never have consigned him to this hotbed of iniquity.

But in the holidays he felt superior to other boys, and even men who had not had the same experiences; and, by the beginning of his third term, when the hotbed of iniquity had grown familiar, he found that there was some degree of fun in it, and even took an active part in its iniquities, beginning with the torture of the shy new boys.

The masters were regarded as complete outsiders, who fulfilled a public duty of a disagreeable and vexatious kind, admitted necessary to the scheme of things. The use of the word 'beak' instead of master proclaimed their status in the eyes of the community, for that word is a slang expression for a magistrate. The school authorities and all their agents were regarded by the boys, much as thieves and burglars view the powers of law and order, with a sly hostility. Their punishments, however highly merited, brought no disgrace. Their favour, on the other hand, brought shame to the recipient unless he could declare that it was given on a false impression. The head master—rather a majestic

figure, who did not come in contact with the younger boys—was said to be a good deal better than the rest, almost the sort of man one 'knew at home.' The boys in Limpidus's house were all of decent birth, but in some other houses of the school there was a mixture. The first notice Limpidus received of this was when somebody asked Stinker about a certain youth in Cockeye's house who hailed from the same county, and was coming to the fore at cricket: 'Oh, yes, I know the man you mean, but I don't know him at home,' was the fastidious answer. The majority of the beaks, it was agreed, were not the sort of people whom one knew at home. Rottar was a slight exception, so was Cockeye, both having been alumni of the famous school.

'A younger son who's poor may sink to anything!' said Stinker feelingly. 'Thank God, a mouldering old aunt of mine, who went to hell the other day, left me a decent income—though sooner than turn beak I'd sweep a crossing.'

CHAPTER V

THE masters with whom Limpidus first came in contact failed to win his admiration. One, Piggy—so called from his facial expression—kept ruthless order in his form and was perforce respected, but he showed his folly in the great importance he attached to trifles, such as clear handwriting and pedantic speech. This was patiently endured in general. But one day Piggy had the cheek to stop a boy in Limpidus's house for failing to aspirate the 'h' in humorous. To every boy there present, such failure was as much a mark of decent breeding as is the aspiration of the 'h' in happy. There rose a general murmur of dissent.

'Every one says 'umorous and 'umour, sir !' objected the delinquent boldly.

'Every one? What do you mean by that?' said Piggy fiercely.

'Every one I know at home, sir.'

'That I hardly think, for I imagine that your home surroundings are not barbarous.'

'The queen and all the royal family and all the House of Lords say 'umour, sir.'

'That may or may not be the case, Fitz-Abbott Junior, but you are guilty of impertinence in the assertion. Bring me a hundred lines this evening before lock-up. Now sit down. Fitz-Beare, take up the parable where he left off !'

If Piggy had desired to prove himself an utter bounder

he could not have done so more effectually in the estimation of the form. And when Fitz-Abbott Junior, in the ensuing holidays, ascertained through his relations that the queen did really drop the 'h' in humour, and on his return to school told Piggy so, expecting an apology, the form-master retorted coolly that the queen was wrong; which every one agreed was treasonable. Rotter would not have said a thing like that, nor would old Cockeye, nor the Incubus (as the head master was colloquially named). The last was nothing in the world if not a courtier. There was another form-master with whom Limpidus had to do in his first year, known as Abomination (or, more shortly, Bommer) from his habit of exploding with a cry of 'Oh, abominable !' and flinging books at the unlucky head of any member of his form who construed wrongly. He was a clergyman, yet had been heard to swear; a beak, yet he had been known to wink at boys who used a crib. He had his good points, every one agreed; was not a rank outsider, like poor Piggy. He even managed to drive home some facts, by dint of shouting and book-throwing, to their callous brains. But when Limpidus was in his form, the chief concern of every member of it was to keep a little ball always upon the move, from hand to hand, without its being spotted by the Bommer's wary eye. Only twice in a whole term was it let fall, entailing general punishment; and when at the end of the last hour of work it reached the hand of Stinker safely, he flung it in the air as he ran out, and there was general cheering.

But the oddities to be encountered on the king's high road of classical education were normal as compared with the admitted freaks. Science, mathematics, music,

French, and drawing were regarded by the school as freakish and eccentric things to be approached sardonically or with glee as the occasion offered; and their professors—although learned and distinguished men—were counted 'mad.' This attitude was justified in nearly every case by the incapacity of these professors to teach the subjects which possessed them utterly. Their earnestness amused the boys.

There was a person who taught physics, to begin with—a little, nervous, fidgety old man, cadaverous and hollow-eyed, and with a long white beard—known as the Louse, some said because of his uncleanness (which was not apparent), and others because of his resemblance to that insect seen beneath the microscope. He had a rage for notes and diagrams. Every boy attending his deblaterations was provided with a good-sized notebook, and supposed to fill it. Having no respect whatever for the Louse, he put down anything that came into his head. The Louse collected all the notebooks periodically, and marked the fullest, 'good,' the emptiest, 'unworthy.' On Limpidus's notebook he inscribed, 'more diagrams'; and Limpidus, who never drew a picture in his life, amused himself thenceforth in making portraits of the Louse in comical positions which might illustrate the law of gravitation, which was the subject, as it happened, of the course of lessons. One day in his instruction he became excited—needlessly, the class considered—held up a piece of paper and exclaimed with touching earnestness: 'Now, boys, you see this bit of paper. If I release it from between my fingers it will fall to the ground.'

At that, the whole class broke into vociferous applause, and some one, ducking down, cried, 'Good old Louse !

Only just found that out? We've known it all our lives.'

The scientist surveyed the ribalds with the utmost horror, and when the frightful din at length subsided, said: 'I never thought to hear English boys deride the honoured name of Newton.'

Undoubtedly the Louse was mad. It was a shock to many of them, when, in after years, the same old Louse was knighted by his sovereign upon becoming president of some absurd association. The Louse was obviously not the sort of person one would know at home.

For 'mathematics'—in his case, simple arithmetic and algebra—Limpidus went to a benevolent old man whom everybody loved and evil treated, surnamed Haystack, from his rumoured inability to see a haystack at a distance of a hundred yards. He was, in fact, exceedingly short-sighted. It was his custom to set easy problems for his pupils to solve out of school. But when they came with the result of their labours, Haystack worked those problems out correctly on the board before collecting the papers. From the day when this was known to be his habit, nobody did a stroke of work beforehand; every boy copied down the process from the blackboard, and every boy got every sum quite right, a result which filled the master with excitement and delight. It was the custom of that room to chew pink blotting-paper to a paste, roll it in pellets and project it at a venture. The walls and ceiling of that room were pimped in this manner. But Haystack did not notice the eruption even when it came occasionally on a window. In order to arouse him it was necessary to throw pink pills at the board on which he chalked. Paff! went the pellet, Haystack jumped, then brought his spectacles to bear

on 'the extraneous matter,' as he called it, at very close quarters. Still in doubt as to its nature he would touch it delicately with a finger which he straightway smelt. Suddenly he faced about and shouted: 'Who threw that?' The whole division rose and volleyed: 'I did, sir.'

'Sit down!' cried Haystack frantically; and when they had obeyed he read them a mild lecture in a grumbling tone.

Occasionally boys freed from some other class-room came to the windows and played antics there, distracting people's minds from mathematics. Then Haystack would send out a boy to drive them off, and then another boy to bring the first one back, and so on till the room was empty or the time was up, whichever happened first. Yet, in spite of his short-sightedness and his inefficiency, the Haystack was the sort of person whom one knew at home.

The French master was not eccentric or a fool, and only was considered comic when enraged. Then only did the perfect frog appear, and accordingly it was the aim of everybody to enrage him. Some of the boys could speak French really well, and all had some slight knowledge of that tongue; but it was not in their present game to know a word of it. They feigned gigantic efforts after the correct pronunciation, grunted like pigs, and made strange hooting noises, and they would compliment the Frenchman gravely on his cleverness in being perfect in so difficult a form of speech.

Music and drawing were alternatives. You went in for one or the other, not for both, unless your people specially desired it. The way in which your destiny was fixed was very simple. Soon after your first entering the

school, the music-master tried your voice, and if he thought it good, you went to music; if it gave him toothache, you were sent to drawing.

Limpidus had a sweet treble voice in his first term at school. A little later it began to crack, and then, for two years, was no more melodious than a screech-owl's. But still, because he had been cast for music, he must sing each week, while other boys whose voices had come back were fixed at drawing. Of instrumental music no one thought, though there was a building set apart for its disciples—a few queer-looking boys, who were considered cranks or foreigners. Passing that building, saner and more manly youths heard squeaks and moans which made them class that kind of music as a beastly row.

The singers, being of the manly sort, allowed no nonsense in the singing class—nonsense in that connection meaning modulation of the voice, a thing for which the music-master (known as a fine musician in the outer world) was always pleading vainly and mechanically. His efforts to put some idea of art into those budding janissaries had become mechanical since he knew that they resisted of set purpose, and that their collective will was stronger than his own. He smiled indulgently on their stentorian notes, and chose for their performance songs in which to shout was obbligatorio. His chief concession and his greatest triumph was the chapel choir. The choir, at his first coming to the school, had been unpopular. He made it popular, after he had given up his first idea of making music popular, by making every member of the school cricket and football teams *ex-officio* a member of the choir. And those stout fellows took their duties seriously, esteeming it a point of honour

to emit more noise than all the congregation put together. To hear them any Sunday—or better still, upon a Founder's Day—was to know the utmost of which British lungs are capable. The music-master heard it only once. He was a man of smooth politeness and a gentle voice, for which cause he was known colloquially as the Worm. He crept away.

What wonder if our hero turned from such instructors and sought the wisdom of his own contemporaries.

CHAPTER VI

AMONG his earliest friends there could be no instructors, for they, like him, were new to their surroundings. But when he passed the persecuted stage, and by some slight distinction in the football field had earned the notice of some older members of his house, he grew in wisdom. Stinker, of course, was always at his ear, a caustic and abusive critic of events; but Stinker's bent was to mislead the earnest seeker after truth. He had misled poor Limpidus a hundred times to his undoing, and gloated on the torments he endured in consequence. But there were others who gave sound advice.

At the beginning of his second year, when coming on a winter's evening from the football field, a fifth-form boy, well known by sight to Limpidus, slapped him on the back and said :—

'You did quite well, Fitz-Bear. By the way, my people know your people, I believe. They told me to bestow a special smile on you. Well, now I've done it.'

The boy in question was named Rogers, Limpidus already knew, though in the house he was familiarly known as Chops, but the surname had conveyed no information to his mind, until this moment, when he gasped :—

'Oh, I say ! Are you Archie Rogers?' The other laid a hand upon his muddy jersey and bowed low. 'Of course I know your people. They were down at Clearfount. Why didn't you tell me before?'

'My people, of course, told me to look after you when you arrived, but that's not quite the thing. It isn't done. You might have been an awful little swine for all I knew, and if you weren't you'd make your way all right, and better without my interfering. Now that you've found your feet, I'm at your service. Count me henceforth as your friend.'

And with a nod and grin the great one trotted on to overtake another fifth-form boy ahead of them.

A few days later, on a half-holiday, Rogers asked Limpidus to go out for a walk with him and with his great friend Devereux, called Spavin by his equals for some cause unknown. For such as Limpidus his name was Devereux. Rogers and he were in a sense philosophers, intent to draw a moral from the passing scene. They had survived the crucial period of school existence, and in the rambles which they took together faced the life of men. Their condescension in admitting him to their companionship, saved Limpidus from being drawn into a lazy, resolutely vicious set of big boys in the lower school, to which he was attracted when they first took notice of him. It was with some idea of rescue that Rogers had revealed himself, he afterwards confessed. They dealt in maxims which seemed good to Limpidus.

'A fellow has to keep his wits about him in a place like this,' said Devereux. 'At first I know he can't; it's quite impossible, he has to drift, but afterwards, when he begins to find his feet—or, as likely as not, he'll go altogether to the dogs if he gets in a degraded set. I'm not a snob, and I don't care a damn if a fellow is the kind of chap whose people one would know at home or not. But I do mind if he's the kind of fellow who is likely some day to get penal servitude for life, and get me into some

disgusting row to-morrow. Everybody has his vices. I don't object to vice of the right sort. I approve of a certain amount of drink and adultery and all that when a chap is fully grown and can afford it. But the dirty little games some fellows here are playing sicken me. It's no good getting boozed or keeping a harem at our age. And some of the degraded devils stick at nothing. They'd forge their father's name or steal a bob. And, by the Lord, they look it. That's the worst of them.'

It was true that there were boys who wallowed in iniquity, boasting that they had broken every law of God and man. Limpidus had felt an awful admiration for them, he was now ashamed to recollect. The little world possessed its well-known criminals and here and there a saint, though that phenomenon was only tolerated in the upper school. The saints were censured like the criminals by moderate men like Devereux and Rogers. Speaking of a sixth-form boy of pious odour, whose handsome face, seen at a distance, had attracted Limpidus, Rogers told how once at Ramsgate, in the summer holidays, he had been accosted by the sixth-form boy in question on the beach and made to take part in a beastly prayer meeting. As Rogers told the story it was screaming fun:—

'There were two or three nursemaids and some staring children and myself, and an old fisherman at a safe distance sitting on a boat and smoking; and a harmonium and a woman'—he used a coarser word as was the custom of the famous school where women were regarded in the light of future prey—'sitting at it, watching for old Purity to give her the tip to begin. Purity chucked hymn-books round to all of us—I went through the whole performance for a rag. Wouldn't

have missed it for anything. Purity and his ——'— again a coarser word than woman—'did the singing—a most rotten show—and then he preached and read some prayers, and then there was another hymn. One infant had a fit—of laughter, I suppose—and had to be carried away. Then Purity shook hands all round. The last I saw of him he was talking to one of the nurse-maids, who felt symptoms of conversion. I've no objection to religion, of course; it has got to be; and I can understand a fellow going to church occasionally, and sometimes admitting he's a bit of a sinner. But that sort of business strikes me as damned nonsense. All his people are like that, you know. Once my mater was at his place for some charitable show and all the old women were chattering away quite comfortably when in pops Father Purity and shouts out: "Let us pray!" He flopped down on his knees bang in the middle of 'em. It made the mater positively sick. They're all like that.'

That they were all like that, and at the same time people of assured position, half justified their son's extravagances in the estimation of these critics. Devereux nodded, then he turned to Limpidus, who had been listening with all his ears and laughing loudly, and remarked: 'Look here, young Limpet, keep that story to yourself. If it spreads among the lower school, I'll just about flay you alive.'

Rogers endorsed the warning by a nod. Limpidus swore to keep the story secret. Their sudden sternness in the midst of comradeship drove home to his intelligence a truth he had already learnt at school: to wit, that those above him on the ladder he was climbing, whether wise or foolish, estimable or contemptible, were superior mortals whose wishes had to be respected and

whose word was law. In this there was no degradation, seeing that in due course he himself would attain to the same eminence and exact the same respect from those beneath him. They were all one kind, all training for the same position in the social order, though some among them might be found unworthy of it.

There were even beggars by profession in the famous school. Some incontinent youths exhausted the whole 'tick' secured for them by parents at the cookshop long before the end of term, as well as all their pocket-money. Not daring to write home and ask for more, these destitute and luckless ones haunted the street at feeding-time, and joined themselves to any passing boy who looked well-fed, with such appeals as :—

'Have you got a tanner on you? I'll pay you back next week, I'm stony just at present. Straight! I've had no breakfast for a fortnight. I know you've got some money. You're a decent sort. Stand us just one éclair! Only a penny bun! Old man, don't be an utter hog! Just one bit of Swiss roll! Oh, God! I'm stony broke! You mangey beast!'

The practice was not very strongly reprehended even by such moralists as Devereux and Rogers, being regarded as the outcome of misfortune, not of wickedness. It was clear that any lower boy of healthy appetite, deprived of means to slake that appetite, would do the same. A boy like Stinker did too much of it, exhausting his account at Herman's shop within the first five weeks of term by reckless gluttony; and in the upper school street mendicancy was, of course, unknown, though private begging was both known and tolerated.

The second truth impressed upon the mind of Limpidus was this: That whatever is done among the right sort

of people is right; and, conversely, whatever is done among the wrong set of people is wrong. And another truth grew clear about the same time. That whatever can be done without unpleasant consequences is good.

It was a philosophy quite different from that which the masters, in a dull, half-hearted way, sought to instil; a religion much at variance with that which was preached—and sometimes earnestly—in the school chapel. Of Christianity, Rogers and his friends said that it was all right in theory, but useless as a rule of conduct in the world to-day. They believed that their own code, being that of Christian gentlemen—ay, and the British laws and Constitution and the social order—were deduced from Christianity, the best that could be made of it in compound with the facts of life.

CHAPTER VII

ANOTHER valuable truth which Limpidus was able to deduce from the school customs was this : that all outsiders were fair game. It was a recognised and honoured form of sport on rainy days, for boys to lurk at windows looking on the street with catapults, and take pot shots at cads. A hit was hailed with cockcrows of delight. Then, raiding parties were sent out when possible, to waylay and chastise the townboys on their way to school. These sallies were not always a complete success. They sometimes failed; and if defeat was flagrant, the venture of a few knights-errant was exalted and became the school's affair. Great were the ingenuity and pains expended to give the cads or 'chaws' a lesson they would not forget.

Nor were the grown-up men of the indigenous population more respected than the children, always excepting tradesmen 'by appointment' to the school, and certain chosen hangers-on, the latter all disreputable, the kind of men who lean against the walls of public houses and deal in surreptitious terriers and rats and badgers. Once every year, upon a Sunday in the summer term, there was a procession of friendly societies, with gold-embroidered sashes, monstrous banners, and a band, to a service of thanksgiving or of consecration or humiliation—nobody knew the precise nature of the ceremony, though it was held to be of a degraded nature—at the parish church. The said procession had to pass by

Cockeye's house, whose wall rose sheer from the roadway with no intervening footwalk. From time immemorial, it had been the custom for members of that house whose windows looked upon the road to try their skill in a peculiar sport on the occasion. The sport consisted of the lifting of a bedroom jug quite full of water, and flinging out its contents with so good an aim that they struck the very apex of the object aimed at, and fell down all around it like a liquid veil. The feat was difficult to perform neatly even in the case of an inanimate and still object; in the case of a living, moving human creature it required extraordinary skill, and in the case of this procession more particularly; because the men composing it, from experience and heredity, knew what to expect, and therefore quickened up and dodged when passing Cockeye's.

For the gentle sportsmen in the windows those varlets in their Sunday clothes were nothing. They had no more animus against them than they had against the rabbits they would pot with saloon rifles in the summer holidays. Their one thought was to hit the object aimed at; and their general failure, due to wariness in the said object, made an occasional success more dear. In Limpidus's second year a boy named Alligator succeeded by an admirable throw in drenching the chief man in the procession, a fat man in a suit of broadcloth, with a silver watch-chain, adorned with a particularly gorgeous scarf *en bandoulière*. Every one for years had tried to get that man, and nobody had ever got him until now. The praise of Alligator was on every tongue.

But the cad apparently objected to that kind of baptism. He complained to the head master, who, happening to owe him money which it was not convenient

to pay up just then (that was the explanation which was current in the school), took heed of what he said and made inquiries. Alligator was severely punished, to the school's disgust. Devereux and Rogers, to whose circle he belonged, were loud in condemnation of such punishment for such a thing—a bit of fun, no more, as if it mattered! It was then that a most striking personality entered the group well known to Limpidus.

This was Carillion, in Cockeye's house, whom everybody great and small called by his real name of George, a proof of most uncommon popularity. When Rogers, in the middle of a crowd down on the cricket-field, prone on the grass in the shade of elms, was holding forth upon the hardship of the case of Alligator, a voice with more of passion in it than was quite correct, cried:—

'Serve him damned well right! Those fellows only do their swagger once a year. It's a damned shame to spoil their little show.'

'You were always an ass, George,' answered Rogers, with a grin. 'You ought to whack the drum for the Salvation Army. That's your future line, dear lad—that, or a good big tub at Hyde Park Corner.'

'They're free-born Britons, hang it!' answered George with fire. 'Who the hell do you chaps think you are, to interfere with them?'

'Don't be offensive, George!' and 'Keep your hair on!' were some of the remarks which hailed this outburst; but some others cried: 'Old George for ever! Keep it up!'

George, nothing daunted, told them plainly what he thought of them, with so much wit, so many apt allusions, and so many jokes, that all who heard grew merry and applauded. The matter ended in a comic fight between

the orator and one who called him a degraded Radical, in which the former showed such wonderful agility that lookers-on had the illusion one derives from clever sword-play, that his adversary was surrounded by a kind of flame.

That was Carillion all over, Limpidus was told. He was the champion boxer and the champion fencer of the school, and one of the best swimmers. In things which few went in for seriously he excelled, while he was slack at things which every one went in for. He never did a stroke of school-work, yet was always reading. He was a fanatical admirer of Disraeli and honestly believed that Gladstone was an incarnation of the devil. 'And yet, to hear him talk,' said Rogers, when expounding this strange character, 'you'd think he was a putrid Radical. He's no end of a big pot at home, but likes to play the bounder. Easily gets excited over trifles. Good old George!'

Limpidus expressed the opinion that the said George was as 'good as a play,' not knowing that the youth in question was behind him. He was disconcerted when Carillion stood forth suddenly, and, pointing to him, said to Rogers:—

'Name this child!'

'Limpidus Fitz-Beare, known as Limpet to the initiated, but to the extractors of quintessence as Greedyguts,' was the reply.

Carillion bowed and murmured: 'Highly honoured! It is a pleasure to meet a boy of such mature perceptions. Fitz-Beare, I hope to cultivate your friendship.'

Limpidus could only blush and look exceeding sheepish, for Carillion with his tall, slim form and slight moustache appeared a man full-grown. He guessed that he was being quizzed, and, as soon as he could do

so without rudeness, slipped away to join a group of boys of his own standing. He feared that he had made an enemy.

But a few days later, when he met Carillion in the street, the great one seized his arm, conducted him to Martin's shop, and stood him tea, making himself exceedingly agreeable though Limpidus could only follow half he said.

He bade his junior read poetry and classic novels, offering to lend him books at any time. Limpidus smiled on the suggestion in a general way, but did not close with it.

And after that, he saw no more of George Carillion beyond a friendly smile at chance encounters, till he passed to the fifth form, where he could meet him more, on equal terms.

There were in the school some boys who 'swotted'—as it was called—at work; but it did not avail them in the lower forms. Their habits were well known; they would prepare the work whatever happened, so others took their ease and let the swots prepare for them. They were the kind who turned up early at the classroom door; and any one who had misgivings turned up early also, to be coached by them. In the upper school, Limpidus found this communistic practice flourishing, but with a difference. The swot among the elders was invited to some idler's room, and there regaled with tea and cakes and fruit before instructing a whole crowd of idlers there assembled. In the lower fifth there was a boy named Jones on the foundation, who was of constant use to Limpidus in that way. Indeed, he was a favourite in Rotter's house. People would swear that there was no one half so learned, but no one really looked on him as

human, except Carillion. Carillion did not swot, but he affected the society of those who did, not in the way of business, but for pleasure—a strange taste! He did not ask people likes Jones to tea to pick their brains, but to talk about the classics and read Shakespeare.

The same tide which had carried Limpidus without an effort of his own into the lower fifth, had borne Carillion in a natural manner to the upper sixth. He was now the greatest man in Limpidus's circle of acquaintance. An invitation to Carillion's study was an honour, and Limpidus, when he received it, was much flattered. The gathering included individuals whom in the lower school he would have designated 'utter freaks.' They read a play of Shakespeare—*Cymbeline*—trying to give to every phrase the right expression. It was very dull, and Limpidus, when his turn came, was nervous and read badly.

'I'm afraid we've bored you horribly,' said George, when it was over.

'Oh, rather not,' said Limpidus, 'I've liked it awfully.'

'A penny for your honest thoughts, my son! Come, out with it! I see it stirring in your brain. Well wast thou christened Limpidus, O most transparent!'

'Well, I was rather wondering what was the use for chaps like us, who won't be writing chaps or actors.'

'You are a strict utilitarian,' said George.

'I wouldn't go so far as that,' said Limpidus, with circumspection.

'Fitz-Beare,' exclaimed Carillion very earnestly, 'I don't know if you are aware of it, but you are highly gifted. I am convinced that, if you cultivate your gifts a little, you will rise to greatness.'

'Oh, I say, you know. Stop fooling!' answered Limpidus.

• One day Carillion met him in the street and invited him to take a country walk. It was a holiday.

'I've never asked about your politics, Fitz-Beare. Your people are Liberals, aren't they?'

'Yes, but I can't help that. At present I should call myself a strong Conservative.'

'Like almost every other fellow here! It is the fashion—I think, because the beaks are mostly Liberals.'

'A fellow has to think things out,' said Limpidus.

Carillion stood still, eyeing his young companion with a sort of rapture.

'Fitz-Beare, you are a perfect genius!' he exclaimed.

'Oh, do shut up!' said Limpidus, a little irritably.

'I really mean it,' said the other laughing. 'You have acquired the tone and catchwords of this place more perfectly than any other boy I ever met. And as everything in our beloved country is an affair of tone and catchwords, I honestly believe that you will make your way in life. Now I—although I'm good at many things—am never likely to succeed, because I'm queer. What are you going to be?'

'I don't quite know,' said Limpidus demurely. 'My governor talks of Parliament, but I don't know.'

'I should have chosen Parliament for you. That, or the diplomatic service. Why not both?'

'Rather a swot,' said Limpidus distrustfully.

'No, you're wrong there,' exclaimed Carillion. 'It would involve a lot of swot for men like Jones or Bellamy'—naming the two best scholars in the school—'but not for you. For you it's cut and dried. It would be for me too, if I were not a heretic. You'll only have to get a

decent private secretary. And Jones or Bellamy would be delighted with the job, to start him off. He'd save you all the work, and see you didn't put your foot in it.'

The enthusiasm of Carillion was infectious. Limpidus, with a smile, agreed to think about it. 'But,' he said, 'I should have thought it more in your line.'

'I'm unconventional,' said George impatiently. 'Look here, for instance. You're going to be confirmed this term in chapel, aren't you?—and receive the sacrament. Every one goes through it. But when it was my turn, I simply couldn't. It isn't that I'm pi. God knows I'm not. But somehow the atmosphere of this place—and my mater is religious and I know her feelings—I couldn't face it. So, even at the cost of grieving the dear mater, for of course it is the kind of thing one can't explain, I jibbed, and I have never been confirmed and never shall be, I suppose.'

It was the custom of the famous school for boys to be confirmed wholesale at or about the age of fifteen years. That ceremony, and the first communion, were so much a matter of routine that Limpidus regarded one who had refused to undergo them as an enemy to sacred custom and established form.

'Oh, but I say, you know; I think you go too far,' he said. 'Of course it looks like humbug and all that. But everybody decent has been through it. I'm not pi either, but I do believe in things.'

'That's where you have the pull of me, my son. That's how you'll win. I wish you'd come sometimes to the Debater—the School Debating Society, you know—I believe you'd do quite well with just a little practice. You are so good at tone and catchwords. Now I, the minute I get up to speak, relapse into the jargon of the

school as naturally as, when I talk to you, I keep relapsing into decent English. Old Cockeye runs the show. He's great on being parliamentary. "My nonhonourable friend referred with pardonable acrimony to a late inopportune event in the collegiate world." He actually said that to correct me, when I told young Hadley not to lose his wool about that job of Alligator. You'll soon tumble to it if I prime you just at first. We meet on Thursday evenings. It's good fun.'

Limpidus, excited by the great one's high opinion of him, expressed readiness.

'Good man,' approved Carillion, 'that's arranged. Every blessed thing in England, which is called public and important, is wrapped up tight in a mysterious jargon to put off outsiders. I'm an outsider.'

'Oh, shut up, Carillion! You're talking utter rot,' cried Limpidus, as if in pain.

'I am, for I can't use the shibboleths. I try to, but they only make me laugh. Now, you are different.'

Limpidus said that he did not know so much about that, but he opined that in all public business there must be formalities.

'That's what I mean, you're made for it,' said George deliriously.

Returning towards the town they passed a disused farmyard where some youthful members of the school were lying in wait for some one. A little later they encountered a whole troop of little town boys going forth in search of birds' eggs or some other rarity. Carillion, to the infinite dismay of Limpidus, stopped and warned those ragamuffins of the ambushade, with the result that they changed direction.

'I say, you shouldn't have done that, you know,' said

Limpidus, with blushes at his own effrontery in venturing to blame the conduct of a sixth-form boy. 'You've spoilt our fellows' sport. It's not the game.'

'I know it's not,' replied Carrillion, laughing, 'and that's just why I did it. I can't play the game. I used to try, but found I couldn't. I can't keep my sympathies confined to "our own fellows"—I'm always thinking of outsiders. It's a handicap. Now, perhaps, you'll understand why I can never hope to have anything of a career in Christian England.'

And Limpidus consoled with George as gravely as if some horrible disease had been the subject of these confidences.

CHAPTER VIII

WHEN Limpidus was in his fifth year at the famous school, and in the lower sixth, his father and his little sister, Agatha, together with his aunt, Miss Rose Fitz-Bear, came down on the occasion of a public function. It was the season when the main part of the family were always at the house in Berkeley Square. The day was perfectly serene; the air was perfumed. In the school grounds and the master's gardens, there were beds of flowers like gorgeous mats imposed on the smooth greensward, and bouquets and festoons of flowers against the sky or beautifying the decay of ancient walls. And when Limpidus led down his 'people' to the playing-fields, there in the hedgerows and across the meadows wild flowers rioted.

Proud of his father's noble and correct appearance, of his aunt's decorum, and his sister's budding charms, Limpidus paraded them wherever there were boys to envy. He invited a few chosen friends to tea with them. Many were the compliments which he received upon the looks of Agatha, now fourteen years of age and an up-standing girl—compliments none the less welcome for being couched in language of the stables. He was pleased, and for the first time noticed for himself that Agatha bade fair to be the object of desire. That was, after all, what girls were meant for; he did not want to have his sister an old maid, though old maids could be

jolly decent, like Aunt Rose. The flutter caused by Agatha's attractions, the cordial respect shown to his father and his aunt, and the remark of Stinker after their departure : 'Old man, I envy you your people. Mine are putrid sights,' made it a day of triumph long-remembered.

When, in the cool of evening, Limpidus walked with his father to the railway station along a pleasant avenue, with Agatha and Miss Fitz-Bear in front, attended by a bodyguard composed of Chops and Spavin, the said Stinker, and two other youths of equal standing, Sir Rusticus delivered himself thus :—

'My boy, it's been a splendid day, and I've enjoyed myself—remembered my own boyhood, though the place has changed a lot. I'm particularly pleased with the report I had of you from Mr Rotherham :—"There is no boy in whose future I have greater confidence." He gave me to understand that you will never set the Thames on fire, but on the other hand, that you have plenty of good sense, a due respect for all authority, and that you have influence with other boys who copy your example. I gathered that he did not quite approve of this, that the example is not altogether what he and the other masters want; and I'm glad of it. He and most of them are parsons; and you can take it from me, my son, that parsons and good women don't know much of life; though some of the former have been like the rest of us. Our worthy rector, Cunningham, at Clearfount, went the pace at Cambridge and in town in my young days. That's why I gave him the living; he's a gentleman. But even he forgets himself occasionally, and talks a lot of bosh. Well, now you've been through the worst

part of the ordeal we all have to go through. It's a roughish one, I know. It knocks off the illusions and teaches one to tolerate a lot of things which priests and women think abominable. But it makes us what we are. When a man's been through it, and has kept his feet, he's tempered steel.

'There's only one thing I want to ask you just at present. Have you any wish to be a soldier? Because, if you have, the time has come to think about it. The profession of arms, the defence of the country and the Empire, is about the noblest that a man can follow. Our family have always held so, and I should be the last to stand in the way if you felt a decided call in that direction. Suppose you wanted just to try the life, it would be easy for you to serve for a few years. But, of course, for many things, I would much rather you went up to Cambridge, and then travelled, as your father did before you—the finest education for an English gentleman.'

Limpidus hastened to assure his father that he had no strong desire to go into the army. Nobody had since the Egyptian war had fizzled out. He gave it as his firm opinion that the army was a 'bore,' except in war-time.

'That is just the answer I expected,' said his father. 'Well, then, we will say that you go on to Cambridge in about a year from now.'

Thus talking, they arrived at the railway station, where the others waited. All stood talking in a cluster on the platform till the train came in. Sir Rusticus gave his son's hand a shake which seemed to say that they were henceforth comrades. His aunt offered her cheek to Limpidus, and 'little' Agatha embraced him with a

transport of affection which he found embarrassing in presence of his schoolmates, until he realised that it was meant for them, and saw their envy. He was a little shocked. A decent girl ought not to do such things. The other sort alone should be provocative. And Agatha was such a kid!

Returning with his fellows in the glow of sunset, hearing their candid praises of his people, Limpidus felt happy or, as he phrased it, 'all-round fit.' His father's talk with him had made it clear that the vile depths of school life were perfectly well known to the old boy; and so that certain things, which until now had vexed his conscience at odd moments, making him think that he was smirched for life, were only what his father had been through before him, what every decent man had undergone—in fact, a part of 'decency.' He must consider himself better and not worse for them; since they were the making of a man like his father, of men like all the great and famous Englishmen whose names, carved here and there about the old school buildings, had given him a patriotic thrill at times. That being so, his father knowing all there was to know of school existence, there was nothing to impair the pleasure Limpidus derived from musing on the words of Rotter: 'There is no boy in whose future I have greater confidence'—whatever that might mean; for, as he thought it over, it seemed to him a stupid thing to say, one of those stupid things the Rotter was for ever saying with an earnest air. And then that about his influence with other boys, it was rubbish, and yet true in a way.

In the early days at school he had despaired of ever gaining any eminence amid that struggling

and blaspheming crowd—had seen no eminence worth gaining save in the athletic field. He had striven for distinction in that field, but hopelessly, knowing full well that he did not deserve it, and that it would be the merest fluke if he attracted notice. In the end he had resigned himself to mediocrity. In school-work excellence was not the thing. There, too, he had resigned himself to mediocrity. And now he found himself distinguished in a way which he had not foreseen, and certainly had never sought—distinguished by the very force of mediocrity. He was the thing. Carillion had been the first to notice it. He was the thing, the very thing, the thing itself. People consulted him on what it was correct to do and say, the proper way of speaking, walking, dressing, sinning. He had now reached a certain position in the school to which a certain amount of swagger was regarded as essential. He never overdid it in the least, nor did he fall short by a hair's-breadth of the thing expected of him. Much cleverer and older boys observed him carefully, and formed their own behaviour upon his. Limpidus invented nothing; all invention was bad form. People with special faculties and special training, people of a baser sort were paid to think for one in after life. The business of a gentleman was to approve or disapprove, according to the accepted standard of his set. A person used to literary English might have judged him somewhat inarticulate, and his vocabulary strangely limited; failing, of course, to realise that the inarticulateness was the acme of good form, and the vocabulary the most exclusive of its kind. He could use classic English when he chose; he did so always

when he wrote an essay, and generally when he wrote a letter.

In the Debating Society, to which Carillion had introduced him, he soon made a name by strict adherence to the parliamentary forms which he soon mastered, and by a way he had of squashing people with a formidably-worded platitude.

'I long to hear you in the House of Commons,' had been George's farewell speech, when he left the school.

'Oh, shut up !' Limpidus had answered, with a weary grin. He knew that George was deuced clever, and made game of him. 'A queer chap, George,' he thought. 'Quite mad, but rather decent.'

'Quite mad' and 'Rather decent' were terms synonymous in the exclusive language of the upper school, applied to boys who had originality of wit or humour, and masters whose discourse was unconventional. George had made Limpidus read books which he found tedious, except a few which, being what in schoolboy language is termed 'hot,' he studied for instruction diligently. They put a fellow up to things he ought to know. Of the great lights of English literature he held the received opinions. Shakespeare was 'great, of course'; Dickens could never draw a gentleman; Thackeray was 'devilish clever and all that'; Scott was 'a bit dry bar *Ivanhoe*'; in Fielding and in Smollett there were ripping things. But if Limpidus had been asked what novel in the English language he liked best to read—apart from the 'hot' books already mentioned—he would have answered without hesitation, '*Handley Cross*,' and if asked for a reason, would have said, 'because it is so true to life.' And all his compeers, even those who, to their

sorrow. were endowed with finer taste, would have agreed that his answer was correct. He was representative. The respect and admiration which befell him as he rose up in the school were those attendant on a creature perfect of its kind.

Limpidus was true to type.

And it was with the reputation of a perfectly sound man that he left the school at length, and went to Cambridge.

CHAPTER IX

LIMPIDUS stood in the gate of manhood, having had his conscience beaten to a pulp after the fashion of those heathen who destroyed some organs of the beasts they worshipped in order to secure for others an exceptional development. The organs thus abnormally developed in the case of Limpidus were those mysterious ones which make an animal gregarious and yet exclusive, predatory yet serene. Just as the janissaries of old Turkish sultans imagined that the world belonged to them and behaved accordingly, while posing as the custodians of law and order, so Limpidus looked out on life with a marauder's eye and deemed that he was born to reap its pleasures, on the understanding that he was a bulwark of his native land.

And foremost in his predatory thoughts was that of woman. It must not be supposed that he had never thought of her before; but with his usual just perception, helped by wise advice from Chops and Spavin, he had realised that women were the game of a maturer age. But now he looked about him with deliberate excitement. The janissaries were let loose upon a social order in which women were secluded. There was no such hindrance to the sport of Limpidus and his compeers. There were, of course, some things at which he drew the line, or, rather, not he but the corporate opinion drew it. It was not the thing deliberately to seduce a decent girl; and modest girls, of any sort, when once they showed their colours,

ought not to be persecuted. But all the gay ones who made overtures, married or single, mercenary or sentimental, were fair game; and any damage that ensued was their look-out.

These were the things that you did not tell your father, but which he knew very well, although your mother didn't. She would not have been your mother if she did.

In this new spirit of adventure, Limpidus went home to Clearfount for the summer holidays—or rather, one might well say, for the Long Vacation, since those holidays would be prolonged until the Cambridge term began. He noticed girls and women on the journey. Even his loving aunts, who cooed for joy on his arrival, did not entirely escape his cool appraisal. Aunt Rose must have been all right once upon a time, he judged, but he could not say the same for poor Aunt Ursula. He marked a plump and smiling housemaid when he went upstairs; but the person in the house whose charms disturbed him was his sister's governess, Miss Eileen Paul. She happened to come down to dinner in a most becoming dress. Her lean, ethereal beauty took his breath away; and there and then he fell in love with her. Unskilled in all approaches save the challenge of the eyes, he was always straying in Miss Paul's direction in the days which followed, and blushing if his father or his aunts surprised him. He evinced a new affection for his sister, in whose company Miss Paul was generally to be found; and it was with thanksgiving that he heard that, having no relations of her own, the governess would stay at Clearfount through the summer holidays. Sir Rusticus, his lady, and the aunts were kindly people who would not exclude the governess from their society. And Limpidus's passion for that lady was made bold at last by the

opinion of a man who happened to be staying in the house, which he overheard one evening after dinner. That man expressed a disrespectful admiration for Miss Paul, and wished to pursue her acquaintance under other circumstances. 'As thorough-paced a little devil as I ever saw, and game for anything,' he said. 'But here it's much too dangerous. There's little Agatha. She's very wide awake, is little Agatha.'

The heart of Limpidus beat very fast. His own observations of Miss Paul had not prepared him for that view of her. But if in truth she was accessible as they averred, why, then his hesitations had been needless. The idea excited him, but made him shyer than before. In the drawing-room that evening he dared not approach her, yet could not keep his eyes away from her. And as he watched her talking to those other men he realised that he was wildly jealous. When, once or twice, her gentle eyes invited him, he answered with a scowl and looked away. His sulking, like his tentative approaches, was rendered ineffectual by shyness. If she noticed it at all, she must have thought it laughable. She could not fail to notice it eventually, since it went on for days. At last the climax came.

Miss Paul had been sent out with a basket to cut flowers for the house. Happening to encounter Limpidus she asked him for his help in such a charming way that he could not refuse. A most bewitching smile rewarded him. She led him on—he could have sworn she led him on—asking him in earnest tones what was the matter; why was he so cross with her, had she offended him in any way, and so on; and smiling on the deep emotion she aroused. He made it plain enough even in words that he adored her; yet still she led him on,

suggesting that the garden was too public, and that they could talk much better in the summer-house. There she sat down and let him take her hand and looked at him in a peculiar way, which made him mad. Yet when the natural outburst came, she fought against him, and, when he had recovered, stood before him cold as ice and horribly sarcastic. She talked to him as if he were an utter cad without a scrap of decency.

'I suppose you thought because I'm only the governess——'

'Oh, I say, you know!' protested Limpidus.

'Well, what did you think!'

'I tell you I was mad!'

'I'm glad you put it in the past! But what was the idea? Having behaved like a young savage, what would you have done? Would you have married me?'

'I never thought at all! I couldn't. I was mad!'

'Well, I can answer for you. No, you wouldn't! Now, perhaps, you see how grossly you insult me. Don't be afraid that I shall tell your father. I'm too disgusted, you horrid, rough, ill-mannered, greedy boy!'

'I say, you know!' protested Limpidus. But she was gone.

For some time after that she treated him with cheerful amiability in public and cut him dead in private; till one morning she came up to him with Agatha and murmured.

'You need not go on sulking with me. I forgive you.'

Once more she smiled on him; but he could not respond. He considered her forgiving tone impertinent from one who was so far from being a Fitz-Beare. She had insulted him by her resentment of attentions which were, after all, a compliment to her; and the memory of that rebuff dejected him, leading him to think himself

endowed with less attraction than the run of men. He did not quite recover his triumphant outlook till, in his second term at Cambridge, he was singled out for favour from among the herd of undergraduates by a very pretty, brown-eyed girl who served behind the counter in a tobacconist's shop. Her reverence atoned for her vulgarity; and when, as the result of their acquaintance, she was sent away from Cambridge, he felt sorry, although by that time he had found his way, by friendly guidance, to some boudoirs of the London *demi-monde*.

CHAPTER X

AT school, the whole art of deportment had consisted in walking with a certain swing, the chin in air, the elbows raised, and managing a tightly rolled-up umbrella in a certain way. At Cambridge, clothes were of the first importance. The 'blood' must have a proper suit for each occasion, and was expected to attract the eye by some amazing feature—a splash of colour in a waist-coat, an attractive button or something extraordinary in the way of boots. The field was wider, there were more competitors, and a great crowd of lookers-on—those humbler undergraduates whose schooling or whose means did not allow them to compete.

Limpidus did not compete, yet he attained pre-eminence. Competition was so foreign to his scheme of life, that he spoke of it with mild approval as a good incentive for the herd. He put himself in the hands of the best tailor, and for the rest relied upon his native instinct; doing the things which everybody did, and saying the things which everybody said, with a sublime unconsciousness of any difficulty which cowed beholders.

He kept his hunter and his hack at livery, besides a very high-wheeled dogcart, in which to drive his chosen friends to Newmarket. His wines were excellent, his manner cool, his tolerance of alien types robust and genial. A fresh-complexioned youth, with freckled nose, not short nor tall, with rather truculent gray eyes, and just a suspicion of the stables in his gait and in the cut

of his clothes, always with his hands in his pockets, and a pipe or a cigar between his perfect teeth, his gown and mortar-board put on in such a manner as to advertise contempt for all things academical, Limpidus trod the Cambridge streets, the solemn quadrangles, with look of high preoccupation, till he met a friend, when he would condescend to nod, or even stop and talk, and sometimes grin. He got drunk only with his equals, and always kept aloof from vulgar brawls. He never took the colour of the university as did those men who had not been to decent schools. He and his friends, though sensitive to the new atmosphere, were not absorbed by it. They kept up their school shibboleths among themselves.

Chapel and lectures were a bore, but they were soon disposed of; and then there was the world of healthy exercise and what they called real life—the ride to hounds in winter, the surreptitious drives to Newmarket, and the occasional escape to London and its manly vice. They dealt in sporting dogs and horseflesh, attended coursing matches, and talked of shooting, steeplechasing, yachting, polo—things in themselves sufficient to exclude less favoured mortals. They admired no work of nature or of art, save in so far as it was practical to their amusement. A wood presented to their eyes suggested game, a hedge an easy jump or the reverse, a river or a lake suggested fish or wild-fowl, or the sport of boating; their taste in pictures was the fleshly nude.

Yet Limpidus was not in the extremest sporting set. His admirable nature shunned extremes. He and his friends did read occasionally, and even hard in view of an examination. They did not think it glorious to be ploughed. They also recognised some duty to society. They visited at certain houses in the town and the

surrounding country, and even played mixed sets of tennis in the summer term, though all agreed that women spoilt the game. There was one great house to which they went with eagerness, partly because it was a long way off, but chiefly on account of the amorous reputation of the hostess. This was Dewby, the Cambridgeshire seat of the Duke of Beams, whose duchess, a brunette of really brilliant charms, was currently reported to have had more lovers than there are days in the year. An invitation to that house conferred a certain dignity on the recipient; it proved him to be quite 'the thing,' for Duchess Jane, however gracious, was discriminating. Every undergraduate who ever was invited to her garden-parties or her water-picnics, went to Dewby with the hope of being chosen, but none had received the slightest token of favour until Limpidus appeared upon the scene. It may have been the fact that he was introduced by George Carillion, who was her nephew, and a standing favourite, or it may have been her recognition of the wealth and consequence of the Fitz-Bearcs; but, whatever may have been the cause, she was exceptionally kind to Limpidus, though hardly in the way expected of her. She invited him to gatherings more intimate than those to which his friends were asked, and made him fetch and carry for her in a manner to proclaim his friendly footing in the house. She even gave him charge of Lady Gwendolen, her daughter, not yet out, when that much-guarded damsel chanced to be in company—a privilege which Limpidus esteemed a quite unmitigated bore. The girl was of the frank and awkward age, and a great reader. She snubbed his well-meant efforts to make conversation, and made him feel a fool without attracting him. He looked on her as an unpleasant,

lanky child and, when with her, was always sighing for her mother.

Carillion was at Cambridge, but already in his fourth year, which meant that Limpidus saw little of him, for their tastes were different. The elder was so seldom to be found at Dewby, that it was a surprise to Limpidus, arriving there one afternoon, to see George playing tennis vigorously with Lady Gwendolen as partner, against a sprawling man with eyeglasses and Lady Kate, who was not yet fifteen. Gwendolen, so heavy on the hands of Limpidus, was light and joyous as a skylark with her cousin, while Kate was very hot and shrill and boisterous. Limpidus was staring at the unknown tennis-player, an undergraduate whom he had not met before. The duchess told him :—

‘He is a Mr Galloway. Wonderfully clever, so George tells me—quite a coming man.’

Every one at Cambridge had heard of Galloway in those days, as winner of a famous prize.

‘Do you know,’ she added intimately, ‘George says the same of you; you are a coming man. Much more so, I imagine, than poor Mr Galloway, who of course is nobody and, George says, has no private means whatever. He has only got so far as this by winning scholarships.’

The set being ended, Lady Gwendolen came up and said :—

‘Mother, may I show Mr Galloway Jehosophat and the puppies?’ (Jehosophat was her pony, so called because it rhymed with ‘he was so fat’—a facetious effort of the duke’s.) ‘He says that he doesn’t know one end of a horse from the other.’ She laughed, as if delighted at his ignorance, which caused in Limpidus a certain stiffness since it stamped the man.

'Yes, certainly, my love,' the duchess answered, and after they had gone, observed: 'The poor man is so plainly marked ineligible, that one might almost hire him as a chaperon.'

Then George came up and greeted Limpidus:—

'A long while since we met. Why do I never see you at the Union? You ought to go there regularly for the sake of practice. Galloway is good, but I am afraid he'll never get a chance in after life with his opinions. He might if he were a revolutionary; but he's a Tory of the most benighted kind.'

'How truly sweet of him!' exclaimed the duchess, 'though I'm a tearing Radical myself.'

'You and Galloway can be of use to each other. I must introduce you,' George continued. 'If ever you want coaching up in any subject, he's your man.'

When Galloway returned, the introduction was effected, and Limpidus was flattered by the slight but noticeable deference paid to him by a man at least four years his senior. Before they all left Dewby, George arranged that they should both take supper at his rooms on their return to Cambridge. The supper was a great success. Both Limpidus and Galloway got drunk enough to converse freely and compare their views on life and death, religion, love, and other earnest subjects which decent people never broach when sober; and afterwards the little lapse from reason made a bond between them, assuring Limpidus that Galloway, however learned, was no prig. It was natural that such a man as Galloway should sentimentalise a bit about the charm of Cambridge—the architecture and 'the 'Backs' and all that cant. Limpidus and such as he beheld such matters in their true perspective. Not the least of this outsider's

virtues in the eyes of Limpidus was that he made no attempt to limit speech to the vocabulary, nor to assume the mental outlook of the right set. They both accused their host of drinking nothing just to laugh at them.

Carillion did not defend himself against the charge of relative sobriety; but he explained:—

‘I’m not like you. I cannot drink a fair amount habitually. I’m generally virtuous and sober, but once in a blue moon I break out, and then I don’t care what I do.’

It was as the result of one of those rare outbreaks, when he threw discretion to the winds, that George left Cambridge suddenly only a few weeks before, in the opinion of his tutor, he might have won the highest honours of the university. It was characteristic that his madness seized at him an age when most men quiet down, and seized him altogether without warning.

When Limpidus condoled with him on the mishap, he said:—

‘Upon the whole, I’m glad. This place is humbug, like a stupid dream. If I’d gone on conforming to the end, I should have been as big a humbug as the others, making people think I believed in it. Now I shall fly to the wilds of Arabia or North Africa, and cleanse my mind of all that rubbish among honest folk.’

Limpidus thought that George had gone too far; and Galloway, in other terms, agreed with him.

‘Carillion’s the most brilliant creature I have ever met. He could do anything he set his mind to. The trouble is his mind will not be set; he scoffs at every form of settlement. He is an anarchist.’

‘Oh, no, I say!’ protested Limpidus. ‘You mustn’t talk like that about old George—a decent chap.’

'I don't mean he's an anarchist in deeds, only in thought.'

'Beyond me, I'm afraid,' said Limpidus repressively, informing Galloway that his analysis, though no doubt very clever, was not interesting.

The outsider was of use to Limpidus in many ways. He coached him for examination, saving him a lot of trouble by his simple way of stating problems which, as printed, were incomprehensible. When Carillion had gone, he was his sponsor at the Union, and, when he dared to speak, prepared his speeches for him and gave him useful hints for their delivery. The sentiments which Limpidus expressed in classic periods in that famous debating society bore no relation to his personal convictions or beliefs, and they were much admired. Two of his speeches in particular made quite a noise: one on the subject of divorce, in which he pictured the delights of a pure, Christian home; and another in defence of the duello as the last resort of every gentleman where honour is at stake. Upon occasion of the former a don, who passed him on his staircase, complimented him upon his parliamentary manner and good churchmanship; and, after the latter, he was quite annoyed when Galloway came up and whispered:—

'You want to learn to modulate your voice. I meant those last few sentences to be declaimed with deep emotion.'

Limpidus had quite forgotten that the speech had anything to do with Galloway, and thought it bad form in the author to remind him of the fact.

Galloway also helped the friends of Limpidus. He became accepted as a hanger-on of their exalted circle, and Limpidus in time conceived a real regard for him, so

much so that Galloway was among the chosen few whom he invited, by his father's leave, to stay at Clearfount for the festivities incidental to his coming of age.

A crowd of the exclusive sort of undergraduates gathered upon the long and dingy platform of the Great Eastern station to see the party off; for Limpidus was then the pattern of a certain set, and many men outside that set paid court to him.

CHAPTER XI

ARRIVED at Liverpool Street, in a state of frolicsome excitement which each was at great pains to hide beneath a stern demeanour, the friends were driven in three hansoms to the Grand Hotel where rooms had been reserved for them. They then had tea, went out and made some purchases, and then returned in time to dress for dinner.

The dinner and libations lasted for three hours. They drank to Church and King, they drank repeatedly to the good health, long life, and temporal success of Limpidus, and Limpidus replied in his best parliamentary style, rendered emotional by wine and intermittent by the lack of help from Galloway. By half-past ten, when they went out to view the town, the hero of the feast and most of his supporters were in the state in which men tread on air, when movement is ecstatic but a thought uncertain, speech enchanting but laborious, and laughter is a power beyond control.

It was a noisy group which, clad in evening dress of perfect fashion, with opera hats clapped anyhow upon the head, and overcoats flung open to display the white cuirass, trailed through Trafalgar Square and up the Haymarket. The rows of lamps crowding into the distance, the moving lights among the traffic, had a festive look; the murmur, dominated by the shouts of newsboys, seemed applauding. Limpidus felt that everything was in his honour. The town belonged to him and such as

him. Those people of the streets were there on sufferance. The policemen were his servants, keeping his preserves. He said good-night to every one of them whom he espied.

All of a sudden he stood still, convulsed with laughter at something Galloway had said. He shouted to the others to come back and hear the joke, but when they came could not remember what it was. Galloway took his arm and marched him on. He kept imploring: 'Do say it again, old man. It's thundering good. I shall remember it all my life.'

The spectacle of Piccadilly and its furtive crowds brought rapture to a climax, and Limpidus let out the war-whoop of an Indian brave.

They went into a bar and drank, then sauntered with a stream of men through a long room with tables in it, where sat bedizened women on the watch. These they inspected in a lofty way, noting the points of this or that seductress, bestowing here a guarded smile, and there a frown of absolute repudiation. To Limpidus, in his elated state, they all seemed lovely.

'There's Stinker—good old Stinker!—and the Earwig,' he cried suddenly, making a dash for a table where two men in evening dress were standing chaffing two insistent girls. A long ceremony of introduction followed, which nearly led to trouble through the rudeness of outsiders, who kept pushing by while it was still in progress.

'Satan's here somewhere,' Stinker informed Limpidus. 'I spoke to him just now. With Chops and Spavin. They're giving supper to some actress-women, I believe;' and then, reverting to his pleasure in this chance encounter:—

'Fancy meeting you, you degraded old beast! I'm devilish pleased!'

He took them all to have a drink. The Earwig claimed his turn in hospitality. Then some one espied Satan in the offing, and gave a hail which brought him to their side, with Chops and Spavin. Again there was the introduction ceremony impeded by the pushing of outsiders, again more drinks, and Limpidus was toasted.

Suddenly Limpidus became aware that Galloway was not among them. Somebody suggested that he might be in the other room. Limpidus went to look, but did not see him. A girl, angelically lovely, smiled upon him. He had taken a seat beside her, in the seventh heaven, when Chops and Satan, Stinker, and the rest, burst in with cries of 'No, you don't, old man! You don't desert us!' And they dragged him off.

As it was nearly closing time, Satan proposed that they should all go on to a Bohemian club of his, where they could drink till morning. Most of the others were agreeable. Limpidus refused, but he was borne forth in the mob of them, with Stinker keeping a policeman's grip upon his arm. They strolled down Piccadilly on the Quadrant side, breasting a dense, disreputable crowd. Stinker released his arm, thinking all danger past. Limpidus doubled back, and hastened to the place where he had left his angel. She had flown away. The room was emptying fast. A waiter told him it was closing time. In the bitterness of disappointment he bestowed a curse upon the man and wandered back into the passage now in semi-darkness, and full of a dense stream of men and women going out from other regions of the house. A woman there beside him touched his hand. He turned and met a pair of yearning eyes. A gust of enervating

perfume took his breath away. She was his angel, he felt certain at the time; though when they got into the lamplight he was not so sure.

At four o'clock next morning he was in Trafalgar Square, leaning against a lion of the Nelson base, and watching the façade of his hotel distrustfully. He had walked every inch of the way from St John's Wood, getting direction from policemen whom alone he trusted, as trained servants of his class, in sympathy with its disorders. He did not feel like rousing up the house, encountering the stare of the night porter; so, after gazing for a while, he sauntered on down Parliament Street to Westminster Bridge.

From the middle of the bridge he watched the break of day upon the river and behind the spires and chimneys, cloudy at first, but growing to a perfect rose; and he was conscious of a new profundity in all his thoughts. That woman had got all the money he had taken out with him, a largish sum. She and another woman, her confederate, had threatened to set ruffians on him if he made a noise, and he had cut a sorry figure in his fright.

There was something to be said for religion and all that. The trouble was that it was quite impracticable. If a man could marry at nineteen or thereabouts, all might be well; but as things were—— He thought of Agatha, and of his aunts, and of his mother, feeling that he could never hold his head up any more.

He walked back in the early sunlight to Trafalgar Square, slipped into the hotel, bathed, changed his clothes, and called for soda-water. By breakfast-time the worst of his remorse was over. By luncheon-time he had regained his wonted countenance, though still he felt that he had done in drunkenness the thing that was

not done by decent people. It was Stinker, coming to the terminus to see him off, who gave the final fillip to his self-respect.

'Feeling the worse for your last night's amusement?' said that man of the world. 'Cheer up, old Limpet! Every one's been through it. My governor says he's felt like suicide a thousand times.'

So after all, it seemed, the shame he felt was only such as every decent man had felt occasionally. Still, he resolved to guard himself against such lapses. In the foul language he had heard addressed to him, the threat of violence, he had caught a terrifying glimpse of the abyss which is revealed in revolutions, the unbelief, the vile irreverence, the criminal ingratitude which always lurk among the lower orders of society. He steadfastly resolved to see no more of it, and he felt purified. All that now remained of the disturbance to his equanimity was an unusual warmth of family affection, an unusual pleasure in the thought of virtue.

The dogcart and the omnibus were at the station. He took a fellow named Trelawney and Galloway with him in the cart, while the remainder got into the omnibus, together with two ladies who had come by the same train.

Limpidus had passed the blazoned gates beside the ivy lodge, and was giving the mare her head on the straight road across the park; he had just indicated with a flourish of his whip the first view of the house, when he spied his sister and Miss Paul and another lady, in light summer raiment, sauntering along a glade towards the lake. Agatha waved her parasol. He cooeed, and, when he came abreast of them, pulled up and gave the groom the reins.

'May as well walk the rest of it,' he said.

It was astonishing how glad he was to see his sister, how satisfied he felt to have her clinging to his arm and pouring out her simple store of news. Miss Paul he only noticed to observe that she looked just the same; his greeting was entirely formal; he still blamed her. But it was the third girl in the party who most occupied his thoughts. It took him time to realise that this was Lady Gwendolen. It was not more than three weeks since he had seen her last at Dewby; but in those three weeks she had passed out of the schoolroom. The long-legged, awkward girl had been transformed into a pretty woman by a simple change of frock and trick of hairdressing.

There was no place like home, after all. The old house, mirrored in the lake, was like a picture. The good old servants, smiling welcome, were a sight to see. The hall and the great staircase—all the rooms which he had known from childhood—looked their best.

When his aunts, embracing him, asked how he felt, he cried: 'By Jove, I feel perfectly ripping. I'm so jolly glad to be at home again among you all.'

Everybody paid him compliments and looked upon him with goodwill. He was the heir, and on the morrow he would come of age.

CHAPTER XII

WHEN Limpidus awoke next morning, he found an under-footman laying out his clothes.

'What are you doing here, Tom?' he inquired, in pure amazement.

'Please, sir, I'm to be your valet, and, please, sir, you're to call me Glubber and not Tom.'

'I shall call you what I damned well please. And who arranged all this?'

'Mr Dove, he told me what to do. But Sir Rusticus said how things was to be.'

'Well, damn you, pour the water in the bath, and take away the can.'

'All right, sir,' answered Tom, 'I shan't want telling twice.'

Even as some ancient Roman of good standing would have presented to his son a slave when he arrived at man's estate, so had Sir Rusticus bestowed Tom Glubber upon Limpidus. Born and bred on the estate, and of the same age as the heir, Tom had always been a humble follower of Limpidus. His parents kept the Ivy Lodge, and were old servants of the Abbey, often cited by Sir Rusticus as good examples of the godly, cleanly, self-respecting English poor.

'What's happening this morning?' inquired Limpidus, with an abysmal yawn.

'A special service in the church directly after breakfast, sir.'

‘What on earth for?’

‘Why, to give thanks for you, sir.’

‘Oh, get out!’

That service, with its special references and its eulogistic sermon, being over, the house-party dispersed. Limpidus sat with his father in the study till eleven o’clock, when Mr Ferriman, the family solicitor, arrived with sundry legal documents for him to sign. These Dove, the butler, and Gibson, the head-gardener, were called in to witness as a signal honour, and each was made to drink a glass of sherry afterwards. Limpidus was in possession of a private income, he had made a will. In short, he was a man of substance on his own account.

The windows of the study were beside the portico, commanding the pilastered bridge across the lake which everybody had to cross to reach the house, the drives from various gates into the park converging on the farther side of it. As Limpidus and his papa sat talking with the lawyer about crops and prices and the country generally, groups of the country-people in their Sunday clothes appeared on all the roads. Just before twelve o’clock the Denderby town band—a crash and blare of brass—was heard approaching. It heralded a fairly large procession of the tenantry, the tradesmen ‘by appointment,’ and their wives and children, enlivened by a small contingent of the local volunteers in scarlet uniform, and firemen wearing belts and great brass helmets. The school-children from Curley, Little Tupton, Willowpond, and Higlingbury had already come upon the scene in crocodiles, impelled by teachers, male and female. The Clearfount children were the last to straggle into sight, the master walking in his shirt-sleeves, hat in hand, and coat across his shoulder, for

the day was warm. At a respectful distance from the house he put his coat on, replaced his hat, and called his flock to order.

The Misses Rose and Ursula Fitz-Beare went out and distributed packets of sweets carried behind them in a clothes-basket by Dove the butler; patting a plump cheek here and there, and bidding its possessor be a good child always.

Then, when the crowd was dense before the house, Limpidus was led forth by his father and delivered a short speech, the house-party and servants crowding in the porch behind him :—

‘My friends, as you all know, I come of age to-day. That means that I am only just a man, and have as yet done nothing to deserve the greeting you have just given me. But my people have been here at Clearfount a good many years; my father has been here at Clearfount all his life, and I know that it is out of your respect and love for him that you make a fuss of me on this occasion. I need only say that I shall do my best to follow in his steps and do my duty by the estate and the country, and that I hope with all my heart he will live as long as I do, to see that I do just what he would wish and nothing else.’

This modest filial utterance was much applauded and admired, by no one more than by Sir Rusticus himself, who then stood forth and spoke for twenty minutes, airing all his fads and foibles with an accent of thanksgiving. When he brushed a teardrop from his eye at the conclusion, there was some enthusiasm; one or two hats were thrown into the air, and the town band struck up ‘Ta-ra-ra Boom-de-ay.’

An obsequious photographer from Denderby then

'took' the group of gentlefolk upon the steps, and, after that was done, was at the service of the multitude. When Limpidus, by the direction of his father, shook hands with an extremely aged, absolutely toothless man whose white beard framed his face as petals frame the daisy—the oldest inhabitant of all the countryside, who had actually walked four miles to see the frolick (as he called it)—the artist begged permission to perpetuate the touching scene; and it was given, to the great delight of the old man.

'Really an admirable little speech, my son,' remarked Sir Rusticus, aglow still from his own much longer effort, as they went to luncheon.

'It was Galloway's idea; he helped me with it,' muttered Limpidus, a little shamefaced.

He could not tell his father that he himself had wished to make a long oration, till Galloway had made him see that it would be more graceful to leave the chief part in the speechifying to his father.

'I like your friend,' Sir Rusticus said warmly. 'A modest, unassuming fellow, and extremely sensible. We must see what we can do for him. A clever man, in his position, who still retains sound principles and does not wish to upset everything, deserves encouragement. We still have wires that we can pull. Well, we shall see.'

At luncheon, Limpidus was freely toasted. And after that there was an hour for meditation and digestion before the party went into the park to grace the revels of the crowd. These consisted (as they do invariably in our country) of athletic sports, some earnest in the form of foot-racing and hurdle-jumping, some jovial, as the climbing of a well-greased pole by active yokels to reach a leg of mutton at the top, or the pursuit (in a close circle)

of a friendless pig by poor old women over sixty years of age. Sir Rusticus had even caused to be revived the ancient English sport of grinning through a horse-collar; and he himself adjudged the prize for that event. The games concluded with a tug-of-war between the two home villages, when Limpidus pulled for Clearfount, and Sir Rusticus for Curley. Clearfount won. And then the rustic crowd spread out upon the grass around the tents, where tea and bread and butter in huge slices, plum cake, and great ham sandwiches were to be had for nothing. The house-party, with all the gentry present, then withdrew into the private grounds.

There everybody wished to have a word with Limpidus, the smaller fry besetting him with their congratulations, the great ones signing to him from afar. In his efforts to escape, he came upon the girls from Clearfount Rectory, five of them, sitting apart from their mamma around a table in the shade of a yew hedge. Stopping to shake hands heartily with all of them, he was suddenly aware that Babs had grown into a perfect beauty. He dropped down on the grass beside them, and talked, first to all of them, and then to Babs particularly. He proposed that she should come with him and see the stables. She agreed at once, but Vera, the plain elder sister, came with her.

From the stables he went into the conservatories, and then into the house to show some new arrangements. At last, in the great drawing-room, Vera, being tired, chose to sit and wait while they went on alone. Then he proposed to Babs that they should steal down to the lake and take a boat. She showed delight at the idea; and, looking in her pretty face, presented to him like a bouquet, he exclaimed :—

'I say, you know, I call this ripping! I haven't had a moment I could call my own all day—till now.'

They stayed upon the lake, concealed by thickets, until after sunset, when the sound of fiddles tuning in the distance reached their ears.

'By Jove, they're going to begin the dancing. We must hurry back,' said Limpidus; and he rowed back to the landing-place with all his might. He helped her out, and moored the boat; and then they ran in the direction of the fiddling, which now resolved itself into the strains of a familiar barn-dance. They came to a marquee already lighted up, in which were many couples, whirling, leaping. Limpidus caught hold of Babs and joined the dancers. It was not till they had been there several minutes that Limpidus beheld his father frowning and making signals to him. Beside him stood the rector, with an anxious face, who signalled to his daughter in like manner.

When they obeyed, both blushing guiltily, Sir Rusticus remarked: 'I'm glad to know you have an eye for beauty;' the rector smiled a mirthless smile and gave his arm to Babs.

'Now go and ask Lady Gwendolen to dance with you, and make your peace with her if you can,' said Sir Rusticus, when she was gone, and all seemed dark to Limpidus. 'If it had not been for that good fellow, Galloway, she would have been without a partner to lead off the dancing. I've sent men looking for you everywhere.'

Limpidus danced with Gwendolen, but thought of Babs. After a little while the house-party retired just as a great hogshead was brought up in a wagon to be tapped ceremoniously by Dove the butler, in his proper

person—the ale which Dove had brewed upon the day when Limpidus came into the world. It was a matter of religion with Sir Rusticus that the peasantry should be allowed to drink their fill. ‘Let them get drunk occasionally,’ he would say. ‘It keeps them happy and contented, and their tempers sweet.’ But he withdrew himself and his own family from their immediate neighbourhood while that medicinal debauch was taking place.

Sir Rusticus read his son a lecture on the subject of young women as they walked together to the house. His manner was by that time free from all asperity. He spoke as a man of the world, a little cynically, but with vast indulgence. There were two ways in which a young man’s passion for a pretty girl might end and neither of them would bear contemplation in the case of Babs. The rector was a gentleman, but Mrs Cunningham left much to be desired. A gossiping, pretentious, vulgar-minded, scheming woman, to speak all the truth. On the other hand, Babs was too well-connected and well-bred to be considered for a moment as the object of a light amour. There would be no objection to a girl entirely suitable, like Lady Gwendolen, supposing he should wish to marry in a year or two.

CHAPTER XIII

WHEN Limpidus went to his room to dress for dinner he found Tom Glubber, who annoyed him greatly by gossiping about the doings of the afternoon, and mentioning the pleasure felt among the servants at his taking notice of 'Miss Barbie from the rectory.' Saving his presence and excusing liberties could not atone for the impertinence. Limpidus told the malapert to leave the room.

He was feeling sore with disappointment in the case of Babs, aware that he had never in his life set eyes upon a girl who suited him so perfectly, but who was none the less forbidden to him by the only law he recognised—the law of the thing done by the best people. Yet he had been worshipped as a little god that day; they seemed to think he could do anything he liked.

He was in a gloomy mood that evening, and throughout the following day—the day before the state ball to be given in his honour, the great event to which his friends looked forward eagerly. His father spoke to him of Lady Gwendolen, but she was not magnetic; she did not smile on him as Babs had smiled continuously throughout their escapade that afternoon. He would have succumbed at once to such a smile from any 'decent girl,' by which he meant a girl in good society.

Descending the great staircase on the evening of the ball, he heard the swish of silken skirts behind him, and,

looking up, beheld the duchess and her daughter. He had not, till then, seen Lady Gwendolen in war-paint.

He begged four dances of her there and then. With undisturbed composure she conceded two, her mother seeming much more pleased than she did. He was so smitten that he did not even notice the enticing glances of Miss Paul, until Trelawney told him of them; and even then he was unmoved, though pleased to think that she repented and longed now for the honour she had spurned so impudently.

It had been one thing dancing in the tent with Babs; it was quite another to perform upon a polished floor with women who regarded steps as of importance, and thought more of appearance than enjoyment. Limpidus danced only when obliged to do so, and then was conscious that he did not shine. He carried off his failure with the jesting air of serious minds which stoop to foolery, Babs was present. By his father's order he danced once with her—'After yesterday you can't ignore her,' said Sir Rusticus—but the performance was devoid of rapture. She did not seem so pretty now in evening dress. She did not look at him, she hardly spoke. She also had received a wiggling from her governor. It was with relief that he restored her to her mother, and himself returned to the pursuit of Gwendolen, waltzing with whom he felt absurdly nervous. He made an ass of himself, forgot the steps, and somehow trod upon her train. The damage had to be repaired. He felt exceedingly annoyed and, when she came again, assailed her with apologies, which she repelled, exclaiming: 'Don't be absurd! Of course I know it was an accident.'

'If you don't mind, we'll sit out our next dance,' said

Limpidus, thinking to turn dishonour to advantage. 'Then I can make my peace.'

'I'll sit it out with you with pleasure, on condition that you do not say another word upon that subject.'

He watched her dancing with Tom Galloway, and ground his teeth as he beheld the skill of that outsider in the art, and her delight in it.

At last they sat alone together on the terrace overlooking the Italian garden. She had put on a fluffy cloak. Limpidus longed savagely to shatter her serenity and force her to feel something more than mere indifference, even though it might be hate. But he was dumb for lack of any precedent which could provide him with the proper formula. She, upon the other hand, was downright saucy. She twitted him with being wretched company, and asked what cause he had to be so gloomy—he, the hero of the hour.

'I don't see that I have any particular reason to be jolly,' answered Limpidus in injured tones. 'I seem to be an all-round failure. Look at me, like a bull in a china-shop; and look at a man like Galloway. You yourself would rather be with him than me.'

'Only because he talks amusingly, and you are glum. I never dreamt you were so silly and self-conscious.'

That was not at all the view which Limpidus desired to give her. It was cheek of her to take it, being such a kid. But in her womanly get-up, and in the starlight, she was quite imposing. He had to remind himself that she was only just out of the schoolroom, and even then could not assume the upper hand.

Meaning to drag her from her pedestal, he said:—

'The fact is, I'm confoundedly jealous.'

'Why—and of whom?' she questioned with a laugh.

'You, and that fellow Galloway.'

'But how?'

Limpidus evaded the straight answer. He replied :—

'I'm not a don like he is, but you mustn't think me quite a fool. I've never swotted, but I'm not one of those fellows who think literature, and everything of that sort, rot. I've read no end of books, and if I don't talk much about them, it's because I don't choose to, not because I can't. It's the same with dancing. It isn't my profession. I'm not a literary man and I'm not a dancing-master, and I'm never going to be either that I know of. Chaps without a penny have to go in thoroughly for things which are no earthly use to me. But I work hard at everything that's likely to be useful to a man in my position. It's quite different. A fellow should know something about horses, but you don't expect a decent man to be a vet.'

'Certainly not,' said Lady Gwendolen agreeably. 'But what has all that got to do with me and Mr Galloway?'

'Oh, I say, you know! You can't ask that. It's plain enough.'

'I do ask, and I want an answer, please, at once. I'm quite excited.'

'Oh, well, you know——'

But just then other people found their way on to the terrace—Agatha and her cousin, Septimus Fitz-Beare, Trelawney and a girl whom Limpidus did not identify.

'I'll tell you some other time.'

'No, tell me now!'

'Couldn't, in such a crowd!' protested Limpidus, delighted to have really roused her curiosity.

'Do tell me now,' she pleaded.

'Sorry! It can't be done.'

Then Galloway appeared, reminding her of an engagement, and she rose proclaiming with a scornful laugh :—

'I don't believe it's really anything at all.'

'Oh, yes, it is. You'll find out some day,' answered Limpidus.

He followed her into the house and, in a minute, saw her floating in the arms of Galloway, talking and smiling to him unconstrainedly.

When the thought occurred to him that she might be describing his conversation with her on the terrace, Limpidus felt really angry with her. This is how he saw the case :—

Lady Gwen was not his fancy, nor he hers. But they were eligible for each other, and would be content to make shift with each other if debarred from the indulgence of their fancies, which could lead to nothing. Since he had renounced Babs, it was only fair that Gwendolen should renounce Galloway, whose company and dancing she enjoyed too well, since he was quite ineligible; the duchess herself had said so in the hearing of him (Limpidus). He thought of a direct appeal to the duchess, it was so unfair.

The appeal, of course, was never made; it could not be by one who worshipped the right thing in social conduct. So Limpidus was obliged to gnaw his grievance for the remainder of his four days' stay at Clearfount. He sought no further interview with Lady Gwen, and he avoided Galloway.

It was not until he and his friends had left the house on their way back to Cambridge that a chance remark let fall by one of them relieved his mind. It happened

in the train, half-way to London. Galloway was in the far corner of the compartment, deep in a book. A man named Howard Jones, as rich as Croesus, sitting opposite to Limpidus, had been sentimentalising about Agatha, recalling all the good things she had said, and the numerous occasions on which, in his opinion, she had looked 'perfectly ripping.' He commemorated with a laugh her cleverness in 'slipping off whenever a chap began to sail too near the wind, and flirting with old Galloway as if her life depended on it.'

'It's a manœuvre, that's all it is, old man. He was a downright godsend to those girls. As safe as if he was a what-d'ye-call-'em in an Eastern show.'

'By Jove,' said Limpidus, 'you've hit it. I never spotted that. I thought they really liked him.'

CHAPTER XIV

IN his last year at Cambridge, Limpidus gave a portion of his time to study, and did not fail of taking his B.A. degree. His tutor, who had some acquaintance with Sir Rusticus, spoke well of his attainments as an all-round man, having no need to use his wits to earn a livelihood, but said that he had not a vestige of the scholar in him; for which Sir Rusticus thanked God devoutly. The news that Limpidus had got a second class impressed his father, who himself at Cambridge had not taken a degree at all nor thought it necessary. He rode across the park and called on Cunningham, just as he had done ten years before when Limpidus had passed the entrance examination of a public school.

'The boy's a good boy, take him all round. He has better brains than his father ever had,' remarked Sir Rusticus with feeling. And the rector, as a proof of sympathetic feeling, sent for a bottle of old port, in which they drank the health of Limpidus.

'What will you make of him? A boy like that should not be idle,' the divine observed, smacking his lips as he put down his wineglass. 'A man in his position is not his own property. He belongs to the country. Will he enter Parliament?'

'Eventually, yes, I hope he will. But there is time enough. He must see something of the world and learn his way about. I myself shall take a hand in his education now the dons have done with him. And he must

travel. I think, a few years in the diplomatic service——'

'Exactly,' said the rector comprehensively.

'I have noticed that a few years in the diplomatic service improves a man's position in the House of Commons. But, as I say, there's time enough for that. He has his commission in the Yeomanry and other little duties to perform, and it's time that he knew something of the business of a great estate. He won't be idle on our hands.'

So it befell that Limpidus, on leaving Cambridge, found himself without responsibilities other than those entailed by a small establishment in the Albany, and his duty to his father, which, though sometimes irksome, was neither onerous nor, on the whole, unpleasant. The business of the family estates could hardly fail to interest him as the heir, and if his father's way of guiding his first social footsteps struck him as quaint, he bore with it respectfully.

Sir Rusticus, if he desired to show his son the world, desired still more to show the world his son. The world, for him, meant all his old acquaintances, and especially some individuals of high renown who accorded him their friendship in return for hospitalities. These famous persons were his fetishes, and he had managed to impose his awe and admiration for them on all the members of his family, his son included. It was typical of the opinions of Sir Rusticus that his heroes were seldom those applauded by the mob. They were men of note who had been shelved, or somehow slighted, men with a grievance which he loyally espoused.

One morning, being at his house in Berkeley Square, he came to his son's chambers in full town array while

Limpidus was having breakfast in his dressing-gown, proposing that they both should stroll down to a certain club, and call upon his old friend, General Briggs, 'our greatest soldier, the hero of Bombadoura and Saprato.' He had heard by chance the day before that the general was in London for a few days. If they went down to the club at twelve o'clock, they would be sure to find him sitting in the window reading the *Times* newspaper. Limpidus was nothing loath. He dressed with care, as for a great occasion; and as they strolled together along Piccadilly in the sunny morning, his father spoke of the magnificent career of Briggs, and the disgrace it was to the country to set such a man aside for men untried, who had not seen a tenth part of his service.

'He is the man who spiked the guns at Bombadoura. He is the man who at Saprato surrounded the main body of the enemy with less than half their number. It will be something for you to say in years to come, that you knew General Briggs.'

But General Briggs, when Limpidus beheld him, appeared unheroic. He was a repellent-looking, stout old gentleman, with a face in which all the veins seemed to have burst, suffusing it with blood in striking contrast with his heavy white moustache and eyebrows. The dome above, completely bald, had suffered from the same suffusion. He was visibly annoyed at their disturbing him in his perusal of the *Times*, to which he held fast all the time that they abode with him, and which he put up again before his face the moment they had said good-bye. When Limpidus came to think over the interview, he realised that General Briggs had uttered not a single word except 'How-do?'—which he had uttered twice, once gruffly to Sir Rusticus, when first disturbed, and

once contemptuously when the younger man was introduced. His other contributions to the conversation had been angry snorts. Yet Sir Rusticus appeared delighted as they walked back towards the Albany, exclaiming :—

‘Now you can say with truth that you’ve known Briggs, one of your father’s oldest friends, as true a man as ever walked in England. If a war should come upon us, you mark my words, they’d have to send their school-made generals packing, and call in old Briggs. Old Briggs and no one else could save the country.’

On another day, he was taken to call on an aged peer known for his world-wide travels, and the books which he had written about savage countries—adventurous books which Limpidus had read. The author had quarrelled with everybody in authority, had had libel actions against newspapers, societies, and individuals. He talked for two hours to Sir Rusticus about a right of way on his estate which had become the subject of litigation, and hardly gave a word or glance to Limpidus. And there were other visits, equally disappointing from the young man’s point of view.

The only personage who deigned to smile on Limpidus, with any fair pretence of being pleased to see him, was the only one of all his father’s heroes who possessed real influence—a Liberal politician, who, according to Sir Rusticus, ought to have been Prime Minister. He had, in fact, been in the Cabinet of more than one administration. This magnate, when Sir Rusticus sent in his name to him at the House, came wreathed in smiles to greet them, hurried them into the smoking-room, and there conversed with them for quite ten minutes, ere he said he must be going.

‘When is your son coming to us?’ he inquired at taking

leave. 'He ought to sit for Denderby, and I suppose he's not a Tory.'

'Not he!' replied Sir Rusticus decidedly. And Limpidus put in a modest word upon his own account, which made the great man squeeze his hand and say:

'That's right. When you're returned M.P. for Denderby, if I'm alive, and still in politics, come straight to me. We want young men like you.'

Sir Rusticus was more than satisfied, he was enraptured by that warm reception, the more so that the politician, though obliged to leave them hurriedly, did not dismiss them, but secured for them a permit for a certain gallery, seated in which they listened to a long debate concerning drainage. The speeches were uninteresting in themselves, but they interested Limpidus as expositions of the forms in use in that august assembly; while Sir Rusticus was happy answering his questions, recalling old debates, and pointing out the seat which he himself had occupied during the ten years when he represented Denderby.

'Parliament is going down,' he told his son. 'It used to be a place reserved for gentlemen; but nowadays they let in clever fellows. The Tories blame us for it; but it's quite inevitable. You must move with the times. There've been occasions when I've felt, myself, that we Liberals were going too far. But I wouldn't leave the party as some fellows did. They tried to get me; said the country was going to the deuce, and we must make a stand to save it, all turn Tories. I told 'em what I thought: that if the country was going to the devil, I'd sooner it went to the devil under a Liberal government. I despise the kind of fellow who will turn his coat just because he dislikes something in the party programme.'

I stick to my own side whatever happens. And I look at it like this : If the people are coming up (and the new franchise settles that), we'd better meet them half-way in a friendly spirit than oppose them. Not that the other side opposes them really any more than we do. They're just as keen on catching votes—a dirty game. But if you're threatened with a flood, it's no good putting up a wall against it; the thing is to dig channels for it to run off where it will do no harm. I heard a fellow say that at a party meeting; and it struck me as the best defence of what we're doing that I've heard. We don't want revolution here in England.'

That word 'revolution' conjured up before the eyes of Limpidus the vision of the small boy with the dirty nose who had overthrown him in the wheelwright's yard at Clearfount years ago, of the foul-mouthed heartless woman who had robbed him in a house in London, of all the wickedness that he had ever known.

'No, that we don't, by Jove !' he answered seriously.

CHAPTER XV

LIMPIDUS had called for his father at his club, and was walking with him up St James's Street towards the family house in Berkeley Square, the evening being very fine, when Sir Rusticus, after some hesitation, addressed him in a very earnest tone. He said :—

'My boy—I have been wanting for some time to speak to you—upon a subject which I know is rather delicate. You and I are not like Dick, Tom, and Harry, who do exactly what they like and when they like. We do what we like. I don't mean to say we don't, and more than they do. But they have only themselves to think about, while we have to think about the Country and the Name and the Property. For a young fellow without property it would be lunacy to think of marrying before he had made his way. But that is not your case. The sooner you provide me with another heir in the direct line, the better I shall be pleased; and I can say the same for your poor mother and your aunts and all the tenantry. So, if you were to marry—I don't say this minute, but within the next two years—some girl we all approve of, I would see you had enough to keep your wife in proper fashion. And marriage need not stop your travelling. You could take her with you; it would keep you out of scrapes, you dog. I know what young men are! And, if you go into the diplomatic service, the possession of a wife—like Lady Gwen, for instance—would be a positive advantage. It would help you on. Your mother and

your aunts and I have thought of Lady Gwen for you, I now confess. But don't think for a minute that I wish to force your inclination. I merely mention her to indicate the kind of girl whom we should welcome in the family—the kind of girl you ought to marry for the sake of the Name and the Property, even though your private taste was for some other kind. You understand me? It is very hard for me to speak to you on such a subject——’ Limpidus did not say much. He was embarrassed, visibly. But the few words which he managed to enunciate were not indignant. From the night of the ball at Clearfount on his coming-of-age, he had thought of Lady Gwendolen at intervals much as a sailor in a tropic sea would think of some cold haven in the north. And that evening he happened to have in his pocket a demand from a fat chorus-girl for nothing less than a *rivière* of diamonds as proof of his affection for her. Immediate marriage with a girl like Gwendolen appeared desirable as an escape from impositions of that kind.

‘I don't suppose she'd have me,’ he remarked aloud.

‘It might be worth your while to ask her,’ said his father dryly.

‘I will, by Jove,’ he said heroically, foreseeing that it would not be an easy job. He had never been so near to making love to Gwendolen or feeling some affection for her as upon that night at Clearfount, now two years ago. Since then, when they had met, she had been undemonstrative, and he had never pressed his claim to intimacy. She could not know that he had been in earnest, more or less, that night, nor that he had been thinking of her, more or less, ever since. So he would have to start afresh from the beginning.

He was trying to forecast the nature of the interview,

seeking the form of words appropriate, when his father startled him by asking suddenly :—

‘Do you know who you are?’

Limpidus only staring, the old gentleman continued :

‘Do you know that you are heir to something not a penny short of £70,000 a year, besides a baronetcy which you or I could convert into a peerage with a very little trouble? There are better matches to be found in England, but not every day. And you’re not deformed in any way, nor yet repulsive. I don’t see that you need be diffident, my son.’

And Limpidus, as he inhaled the meaning of his father’s words, came to the same conclusion. He need not be diffident; for he was jolly well worth any girl’s acceptance. If Lady Gwendolen refused him, then the more fool she !

He dined in Berkeley Square. His sister came in late for dinner, dressed for conquest.

‘I’ve got three invitations for to-night,’ she told him, ‘but only two are any good. Aunt Fay is calling here for me at nine o’clock, and we shall go first to the Denderbys’, and if we don’t approve of that, on to Countess Lauterbrunnen’s.’

‘What mysteries, you puss !’ remarked Sir Rusticus. ‘Why is one of your invitations no good? And how can you possibly disapprove of the Denderbys, our oldest friends and neighbours in the country?’

‘Suppose I don’t see some one I particularly want to meet,’ said Agatha, with arch defiance.

‘Who’s going to the Denderbys?’ asked Limpidus.

Agatha chanted a long list of people perfectly well known to both of them.

Limpidus was seeking in his mind another question

which would not arouse his sister's curiosity, when Sir Rusticus came to his assistance, saying :—

'I suppose the duchess will be there?'

'No. She has refused; I heard it from Lord Denderby himself at Ranelagh. There's some big function on at the Italian Embassy. But I know she's coming to the Lauterbrunnens later on.'

Limpidus looked at his plate. It was not till near the end of dinner that he said to Agatha : 'Upon my word, I think I'll go with you. I'm feeling bored. I do possess an invitation to the Denderbys', and I suppose that you can smuggle me into the other show.'

'Rather! But you'll have to dance.'

Limpidus went back to the Albany and made himself immaculate with Glubber's help. He was back again in Berkeley Square when his aunt, Lady Laburnham came in her carriage with her sole unmarried daughter to fetch Agatha. There were joyful exclamations at the sight of Limpidus, who acquitted himself so well as a squire of dames that his aunt, a lady of the highest standards, noticed his efficiency.

His father's words that afternoon had made him conscious of his worth, and they kept ringing in his ears : 'Seventy thousand pounds a year—the Name—the Property—the Country——' And there was no mistake about the flutter his appearance caused among the marriageable damsels and their anxious mothers. It was well-bred, well-disguised, but it was there. He knew it. He had but to throw his handkerchief at any girl and she was his. A certain pathos mingled with his sense of triumph, because he might not use the power inherent in him. There were at least a score of girls he would prefer to Gwendolen, but they were none of them

so worthy of the Name and Property. He was not for such as these. He was for Lady Gwendolen. It was a sacrifice required of both of them, for the sake of the Name, the Country, and the Property.

It was after midnight when he met his fellow-victim at the Countess Lauterbrunnen's. She seemed quite pleased to see him in a careless way. The duchess sent them off together to the supper-room. Limpidus had not meant to risk his fate for several days. His idea had been to make sure of his ground beforehand. But, finding Gwendolen in a companionable mood, and feeling sure that no girl would refuse him if she realised his worth, he set to work to try to make her realise it. He was at no loss for words. People in their position, he informed her, were not like Dick, Tom, and Harry. They could not do exactly what they liked on all occasions. He, for instance, would do wrong to think of marriage with any girl who chanced to take his fancy. He had to think of the Property, the Name, the Country, and she, too, ought to think of her position. His father wanted him to marry, and had promised him a good allowance if he married the right sort of girl; and when the dear old boy departed, there was Clearfount Abbey and the other properties. He spread the rent-roll of his great possessions like a peacock's tail before her, and for the sake of the Name, the Country, and the Property adjured her to consent to be his wife.

They were sitting in two easy chairs beside a little table, and she was eating strawberry ice with a spoon. She scraped the plate before she said a word. Then she replied :—

'I don't feel at all like that, do you?'

'Like what?' asked Limpidus in blank amazement.

'Like marrying any one who doesn't care about me as a human being, but merely as an adjunct——'

'I don't know what you mean! It isn't that. You know quite well I care about you, Gwen. I put it badly.'

'On the contrary, I think you put it rather well,' said Gwendolen reflectively. 'I dare say it would appeal to older women. But I am still a girl and—well, romantic. You have been perfectly straightforward, and I thank you. But the answer's no.'

She rose and smoothed her dress. He led her back into the ballroom, risking a whisper just before they parted: 'Not for always?' She answered: 'It is "No" at present, quite decidedly,' aloud so that the duchess overheard and came towards them, saying with a smile: 'What's that? A woman's no! You mustn't let that daunt you, Limpidus.'

But Limpidus was daunted for the moment. It all came of his unlucky inborn craving for a gentlemanlike form of words. The form of words, the train of thought, his father had impressed on him that afternoon, eminently gentlemanlike as he considered, had taken hold of him to his discomfiture and wrecked his chances. He cursed the need of such emotional occasions when formulas and precedents are nothing worth. He cursed the impudence of Gwendolen in daring to find fault with a proposal faultless of its kind. He cursed the impudence of girls in general and their blind conceit.

CHAPTER XVI

LORD ELDERBERRY was a man of fifty, of such frivolous pursuits that men of his own age fought shy of him. His skill in everything to do with horseflesh alone preserved him from becoming despicable. He was Limpidus's cousin on the mother's side; but Limpidus and all his set affected pity for him, while admitting that he had his uses as a source of fun. Two days after that unlucky night a party of gay ladies of the chorus mixed with gilded youths, on Elderberry's coach, alarmed the Richmond road on a fine summer evening; Elderberry himself, with fat, good-natured Polly Plummer on the box beside him, driving as he only could.

A cloud of frills and ribbons and great picture-hats aflutter like a garden in the breeze, a glimpse of pretty, laughing faces, gusts of perfume and a din of chatter, a sense of going and a rush of air, with Elderberry's whip controlling all—that was the impression left on Limpidus when they got down. It made for recklessness. When everybody, having emptied a recuperative glass, was voting for a stroll in Richmond Park before the dinner hour, he caught the eye of an engaging little creature and walked off with her. She was pretty without paint or powder, and she tried to please him. He stuck to her throughout the evening. The more he ate and drank the more he liked her. A touch of Cockney in her speech did not appal him. What did he care if she was unpresentable; he did not wish to present her;

he wished to take her to himself, to hug, to eat her. 'Look out, young man!' growled Elderberry sagely. 'Oh, I'm all right. Don't worry!' answered Limpidus.

But he was not all right. The drive to London in the dark, with her beside him, finished it. That night he could not sleep a wink and the next day could settle down to nothing, until three o'clock—the hour when she had said that he might call upon her.

She lived in a mean terrace off the Fulham Road. Limpidus rang the bell with grave misgivings, and asked a slipshod woman for Miss Maudie Mandeville—that being the name which she had given him to ruminate. He was shown into a sitting-room of which the furniture was decked with bows of yellow ribbon stuck about at random; the uncleaned window looked out on the backs of houses. He felt defiled till Maudie entered, and transfigured everything. But she was shy, embarrassed, altered in the night. She would not let him touch her, and kept looking at her watch. To his chagrin she told him that a 'little friend' of hers was coming to tea 'to make it proper.' And in due time the friend appeared—a tall, deep-bosomed damsel, good-looking, but much painted and considerably overdressed, who was introduced as 'Miss Elaine de Vere.' The noble name affrighted Limpidus, making him wish that he himself had used some *nom-de-guerre*, John Smith or William Jones. In his own name he felt as helpless as an unarmed man before a Huron in full war-paint. And Maudie kept the Huron at her side. When he invited her to dine with him that night at Jimmy's, she insisted on his asking Miss de Vere as well; which was annoying, for Maudie by herself might pass with envy, but Miss de Vere attracted notice like the blare of a brass band.

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The Huron, however, was good-natured. She asked Limpidus, aside, if he had not a friend whom he could bring to keep her company, and leave him free to talk to Maudie only. It struck him as an excellent idea; but for the life of him he could not think of any one among his friends whom he would care to take so deep into his confidence, except—the thought came later, as an inspiration—Galloway!

He had only once seen Galloway since leaving Cambridge. The poor chap was in lodgings near Victoria, trying his hand at literary work. He had preferred that hand-to-mouth existence to a college fellowship. Limpidus took a cab and went to call on him.

By great good fortune, Galloway was in. There was nothing shabby in the aspect of the sitting-room, and Galloway himself looked fairly prosperous, but Limpidus was conscious of a wave of pity, and some compunction for his long neglect of him. He apologised for that neglect in heartfelt tones.

'What are you doing this evening, old man? Come and dine with me at Jimmy's. I've let myself in for a dinner to two girls when I only wanted one of them. If you'll come and help me, I shall really be obliged. A burst'll do you good. You're looking seedy.'

'All right, I'll come,' said Galloway good-naturedly.

'Oh, and I say! If you get the chance, you might give yours the tip that I'm really gone on her friend, and want her to help me.'

'I will if I get the chance. Dress, I suppose?'

'Of course,' said Limpidus.

The success of that dinner-party was due entirely to Galloway. Limpidus was in a state of nerves for fear lest some one whom he 'knew at home' should see him

in the company of Miss de Vere. But thanks to the wit which Galloway expended, and the wine supplied by a pontifical head-waiter, all went well. In the end, even the flamboyance of Miss de Vere, whom Limpidus at first had felt desire to murder, became harmonious in the atmosphere of hyperbolic and fantastic fun which Galloway created. Miss de Vere was captivated by his cleverness. She slapped him with an ostrich-feather fan, which she displayed perpetually, with the consciousness that goes with the possession of a handsome thing. And Limpidus was able to converse with Maudie. He whispered that she had been cruel to drag in her friend when he so longed to have her to himself.

'But what would people say?' she murmured, horrified.

'I don't care what they say,' said Limpidus, 'so why should you?'

'It's harder for a girl,' she murmured wistfully. 'And you're so rich and grand. I heard that yesterday.'

She looked so tempting that she forced him to declare that she was quite presentable, that he would not mind being seen with her anywhere, or introducing her to anybody, and that he would never feel the same about another girl, ere Miss de Vere remarked that it was time to go.

After seeing the ladies into a cab, Limpidus took Galloway round to his chambers. That good fellow told him :—

'Miss de Vere will help you. Give her some winter furs and she'll betray her friend all right. She didn't tell me so, but she did say that she'd do anything to get a set of sables for the winter.'

'Good!' cried Limpidus. 'I say, old man, you've

helped me no end. If ever I can be of any use to you, just let me know. I'm afraid you've been having a pretty thin time.'

'Don't worry about me,' said Galloway. 'I scrape along. But if you should hear of a wealthy politician or philanthropist in want of a good private secretary, and could manage to remember me, I should be grateful. I want to get my foot upon the ladder.'

'Rather! By Jove, I'll make a note of that. I'll make inquiries.'

And, as it happened, but a few days later, Limpidus heard a member of his club, one of those cranks who are for ever organising charities which no one wants, mentioning his need of an efficient secretary, and he took the pains to cross the room and spend five minutes talking to the man. He did not hear that Galloway had got the post till some months later, after the catastrophe.

For his amour with Maudie ended in a great catastrophe. His wooing of that charming little body prospered, everything went well with Miss de Vere's assistance. He enjoyed himself for weeks, and might have gone on enjoying himself for years—or so it seemed to him—but for the idiocy of the girl herself. She was a perfect fool. She would not see how utterly impossible she really was. She expected him to take the air with her at hours when decent people were about. She expected him to take her out to decent places. All that was bad enough. But there was worse: she wanted him to know and love her people! Her papa was an insurance agent resident at Brixton. Limpidus excused himself, as best he could, a dozen times. She would not take a hint; she would put tactless questions in pathetic tones, and drive him

to distinct replies. She wept. He found that, after weeks of intimacy, she had not yet realised that he was altogether of a different world. He put up with a lot, but when, one day, he found with her a youth impossible in garb and speech, who wrung his hand and chuckled, 'Pleased to meet you,' and heard that that youth was her brother, he could bear no more. When the visitor had gone there was a battle royal. She told him that her brother was a perfect gentleman. That was the end. Limpidus could have no more to do with her.

She wrote some contrite letters, each beginning 'Darling Boo-Boo'—her pet name for him—but he was adamant. Those letters ceased at length, and he imagined he had done with her. And then the horrible thing happened. He was sued for breach of promise. Sir Rusticus, in a half-frantic state, tried vainly to effect a compromise. Limpidus swore that he had never promised marriage.

'I should hope not,' said his father. 'But they'll always give a case against a gentleman.'

The case went into court and caused a nine days' scandal. Limpidus's letters beginning 'Sweetest Pusskins,' and Maudie's letters beginning 'Darling Boo-Boo,' appeared in print in certain journals, in spite of all the efforts of Sir Rusticus and his solicitors. The phrase 'when we are married' occurred in one of those letters. Maudie was awarded £4000 damages.

Sir Rusticus was more perturbed on this occasion than any one remembered to have seen him in his life. He shouted :—

'Damn you, sir. I thought you told me you had never said a word of marriage to the woman, much less written one.'

'I'm sure I never did,' gasped Limpidus. 'If I wrote the word, I'll swear I put it in inverted commas.'

Sir Rusticus guffawed, much to his own relief.

'That's better,' he remarked, when he regained his gravity. 'I was afraid you really had been caught by such a girl, in which case I should have been tempted to disown you. We don't run to idiots in our family. But I can't afford any more such jokes, so I suggest you travel for a year or two. Sow your wild oats in countries where they won't spring up and choke your poor old father.'

Sir Rusticus had quite recovered his good humour, but Limpidus still hung his head. The judges' words of stern reproof, published in the newspapers, had hurt his dignity.

Limpidus was heartily ashamed of the whole episode, and wished to have it buried in oblivion. But Sir Rusticus was so delighted with the joke about inverted commas, that he went round all the clubs repeating it. It earned for Limpidus the reputation of a pretty wit. Men of high standing slapped the son upon the back, applauding it—applause which Limpidus did not know how to take, for he had made the statement in all earnestness.

One morning, riding in the Park, Gwendolen stopped and spoke to him. She blushed as she gave him her hand.

'Limpidus,' she said, 'I've been wanting ever so long to say I'm sorry for you. It must be horrid, having all those people talking about something which to you is rather sacred. She is lovely. I went to see her in *All's Fair* the other night. And I'm sure I do not blame you in the least. I sympathise. It must be dreadful to be torn from any one one really cares about by social duty.'

I always pity the princesses who are not allowed to choose at all. But of course it was perfectly horrid of her to drag it into court. It must have made it so much worse for you. I wished to tell you this, and to assure you that, whatever other people think, you have a friend in me.'

Limpidus was taken by surprise. She had got hold of the wrong end of the stick, but he did not correct her. She had not heard of the inverted commas, that was evident. He had avoided her ever since the night of her refusal, first on account of Maudie (who engrossed his leisure), and afterwards because the scandal made him shy of everybody.

He had regarded her as altogether lost to him, and now she came towards him of her own accord. He told her he was going to travel for a year or two. She had already heard it. She said that 'they'—meaning the duke and duchess and herself—would be at Karlsbad in the autumn, and probably at Monte Carlo in the early spring.

CHAPTER XVII

ON a cloudy but not rainy summer's day, Limpidus watched the cliffs of England, fast receding, with emotion due to the late parting with his father, who had bidden him remember always that he was an English gentleman. He felt a little of the grief of exile. It was hard to leave the things one cared about. He thought of hunting mornings down at Clearfount, of Epsom Downs and Newmarket, of Cambridge and Pall Mall. Nowhere else he knew could he be quite so happy. But duty called. A man of his condition, which stood for England to the outer world, should see the outer world and make a note of it.

The demeanour of the sloppy, blouse-clad porters with brass badges, who swarmed upon the boat the moment she drew up beside the quay at Calais, was free and easy as compared with that of English railway porters on Dover pier. It reminded him that he was now in a republic, a state of things abhorrent to his temper and traditions. But the presence of his own man, Glubber, wrestling for the luggage with those harpies, and commanding them by force of British phlegm, preserved him from too much dejection at the thought. And then his travelling companion, old Sir Barnet Veale, emerged from down below, where he had lain *perdu* during the crossing, in a purple rage with all the porters and with Braun, his courier, and every one who chanced to brush against him.

Sir Rusticus had thought himself extremely fortunate to be able to confide his son, going abroad for the first time, to so old a friend and so experienced a traveller as Veale, who, being an enthusiastic mountaineer, was bound for Switzerland as usual at that season. Limpidus must see Switzerland; and it was a pastoral and harmless country in which to make his first acquaintance with the foreign devils. He could spend a month there in the care of good Sir Barnet till he found his feet.

They were supposed to go by train from Calais straight to Bâle; but Limpidus remembered that France, though a republic, possessed a capital renowned for royal pleasures, and so, as luck would have it, did Sir Barnet. Emerging from the Customs House in better humour, he proclaimed:—

‘I think we’ll go via Paris after all. We’ll have a night there,’ and straightway ordered Braun to make the necessary change of tickets, he himself scorning to talk French to varlets.

Upon the journey up to Paris Sir Barnet read *The Times*, and *The Spectator*, and dozed between whiles. Limpidus read sundry journals of a lighter sort and looked out of the window now and then.

‘Good hunting country.’

Sir Barnet looked round the edge of *The Times* and laughed:—

‘You ought to see ’em hunting. It would make you laugh. More like a minuet.’

‘Don’t they preserve at all? I can’t see any coverts.’

‘Only a few big landlords here and there.’

Limpidus frowned and clicked his tongue despairingly.

‘Wait till you see my mountains,’ said Sir Barnet ere

subsiding. 'They make life worth living, make you feel you've got a soul.'

Limpidus had no desire for such a feeling, which he judged unhealthy. But he had heard it said that good Sir Barnet, when at home in England, was not allowed to call his soul his own, so absolute was Lady Veale's dominion over him. She was a bony woman, great at organising. No wonder the old boy preferred the mountains.

But all his views of good Sir Barnet changed after a night in Paris. Limpidus, at setting out, had thought of the attendance on his father's friend as a decided nuisance. But after their Parisian rambles he thought otherwise. He would not have objected to accompany Sir Barnet to any of the capitals of Europe. But Switzerland was quite another matter, and Sir Barnet was intent on Switzerland. He got excited at a glimpse of snow-clad mountains, and mentioned their respective altitudes and the difficulties which each presented to the climber. The sunny summer towns along the lake, where there were tennis-courts and boats for hire and swimming-baths, appealed to Limpidus far more than the surrounding heights, which seemed designed by Nature as a background merely. But Sir Barnet was for scaling them. He was going to a place high up above the forests of a certain valley, right on the edge of the eternal snows—a place where only serious climbers went, he told his young companion.

'You'll see, there's nothing like it in the world except some spots I know in the Himalayas, and one or two in the Caucasus. It's grand! And there you have the comfort of a first-class hotel in a place where you can fancy yourself thousands of miles away from civilisation.

I and a few more fill the place each summer. They're all keen men and women, serious climbers. You're lucky in your first introduction to Switzerland. You'll learn to know it better in a summer than the tourists do in twenty years. And you'll have nothing to unlearn afterwards, that's a great advantage. I was not so lucky. I started in a wretched, amateurish way.'

Thus did Sir Barnet discourse on a drive in a rattle-trap carriage, drawn seemingly at random by two unkempt horses, up an interminable zigzag road through gloomy forests and occasionally on the verge of an abyss; while the driver resolutely turned his back upon his proper business in order to talk to Sir Barnet, who paid little heed. And there grew up in the mind of Limpidus a cold suspicion which was confirmed when, arrived at the hotel, Sir Barnet lost no time in laying out his climbing tackle and summoning his favourite guide. It was that the old fellow was demented or, in other words, a crank. He had his points, no doubt, but he was hopeless. Thus, once for all, was good Sir Barnet weighed in the balance of the best conventions, and found wanting.

Yet Limpidus remained with him for several days, for lack of any good excuse for leaving him. The hotel was given up to climbing maniacs. There were women who might have been good-looking in a proper state; but from hours spent in the glaring sun on snow and ice they were disfigured and discoloured, and they did not scruple to wear healing grease in public. Venus herself would have appalled a fellow under such conditions. Those people talked of nothing but of climbing chimneys, crossing glaciers. They compared the strength of ropes, the make of axes. They treated Limpidus as a beginner, and expected him to show respect and eagerness.

The air up there was health-giving. It made him wish to do things, and there was nothing to do; that was his chief complaint. For it was merely waste of time to go out scrambling with Sir Barnet and his chosen guide—a sturdy rascal who thought only of his business, and listened to the ravings of the worthy baronet with blank indifference. To see the zest with which Sir Barnet crossed great chunks of ice, the flutter of delight with which he climbed some face of rock, his movements like the motions of a crab, was to realise the meaning of the word delusion.

One day Sir Barnet led his young friend through great dangers to a peak which seemed to Limpidus quite smooth and sheer. But it was climbable. Sir Barnet wished to try it, but the guide demurred. He would not take Sir Barnet without some apparatus which they had not brought. But he would take the younger gentleman.

‘I’m damned if he will,’ said Limpidus emphatically, when Sir Barnet had translated the man’s speech to him. ‘I’ll see him to hell first.’ Did they suppose that he was going to risk his neck and tire himself to death with such a climb—for nothing? A heavy wager might have made it worth attempting, or the sight of his own set all eager to perform the feat; but even that he doubted. A beastly mountain ending in the clouds, with nothing at the top and not a soul in sight; where was the sport?

Sir Barnet looked quite shocked.

‘Dear me,’ he said. ‘Don’t do it if you feel the least afraid.’

‘I haven’t the least intention of doing it,’ said Limpidus with heat. ‘I’m not a fool.’

'Dear me! Dear me!'

Limpidus caught a grin of strong approval from the guide, which showed the fellow was not mad himself, although he guided madmen. And from that day forth, Sir Barnet ceased to treat him as a pupil, acknowledging his right to go another way if it so pleased him. Limpidus desired to go another way, but had as yet no clear idea which way to go. One day when he had walked with an old gentleman and two ladies, mere hangers-on of the demented climbers, to a certain point of view, he found that point already occupied by tourists, one of whom sprang up and cried his name. It was Carillion.

'What are you doing here?' was shouted on both sides.

'It's jolly running into you like this,' said George; and Limpidus, on his side, felt as if a burden had been lifted off his shoulders. Here at last was some one human whom he could consult.

But there was something wrong about Carillion. He kept glancing at him with distrust. Soon he had spotted it. It was the hat—a greenish, slouch affair, with something like a feather sticking up—a thing no self-respecting man would wear. Old George had always been a little queer.

They sat together on an edge of rock commanding a tremendous view of shining peaks and deep blue gorges, in which, far down below, there were pine forests and, still farther, villages amid green lawns and cornfields newly reaped, and vineyards. The sky was burning blue, the sun a blaze.

'I call this glorious,' exclaimed Carillion, fanning himself with that disgusting hat.

'I'm sick of it,' said Limpidus laconically. 'Been here a fortnight. Nothing to do.'

'What's the matter with the mountains?' asked Carillion.

'Oh, they're all right in their way, but they're no earthly use. There's not a yard of level turf on which a horse could canter, and at the hotel where I am there isn't so much as a tennis-court. The guides say there's a chamois somewhere, but you mustn't shoot it, because there's a close time of five years. The mountains look all right in pictures, but I find them boring. I dare say if a fellow was run down or crossed in love——'

Carillion, with his eyes upon a distant snow-cap, mouthed out two lines of Aristophanes.

'What's that?' said Limpidus.

'A tribute to your instinct,' said Carillion. 'As I always told you, Limpy, you seem born to greatness, because you always think exactly what an Englishman of your position ought to think. These mountains which rejoice the hearts of men of art and letters, you despise.'

'I don't despise 'em,' answered Limpidus dispassionately. 'They simple don't appeal to me, that's all.'

'That's just the point. You know instinctively what is necessary to your genius, and reject instinctively what is useless or injurious. I envy you the gift.'

'Of course I'm glad I've seen them, in a way.'

'Of course you are, because you now know they are useless to you. If you had never seen them you might have been imagining that they would in some way appeal to you or enlarge your vision of the world. You might have longed to see them.'

'No, by Jove!'

'Well, perhaps not. But still you might have felt that there was something in the world you hadn't seen

and judged, something on which you could not give a firm opinion. It is desirable that a man of high position should have seen enough of everything to form a judgment of his own by which to check the utterances of enthusiasm.'

'Yes, I quite think that.'

'Well, there's only one thing you must remember: not to speak your mind too plainly in the presence of the kind of people who really do admire this sort of thing.'

'Of course,' said Limpidus. 'I don't go out of my way to hurt people's feelings. I've played up to Sir Barnet here like anything. It's the climbing about after nothing, and the ghastly stillness, sickens me. I'm usually rather keen on art and things.'

'Well, I'm going to make a suggestion. Don't accept it if it doesn't suit you. I'm on my way to Karlsbad. My aunt and cousins, and perhaps my uncle, will be there in six weeks' time. And there'll be other people whom you know. I travel in my own style, walking mostly. I shall go to Munich and some other places which you ought to see. I'm quite alone. The folk you see with me to-day I met last night, and found that they were going in the same direction. I spend to-night at your hotel. Pack up your traps and start with me to-morrow morning. Your luggage you can send by post. We can't do that in England. So there's something to be said for this republic.'

'It's jolly good of you,' said Limpidus. 'I'll come with pleasure.'

So it was arranged. Limpidus was bold to break with good Sir Barnet, now that he had Carillion at his side to pacify that aged lunatic with well-informed respectful questions about climbing.

Sir Barnet, scarlet-faced from a day spent on the snow, his blue eyes shining with enthusiasm, shook hands heartily with Limpidus that night and wished him well, before they went to their respective bedrooms. Limpidus was truly thankful to Carillion, delighted to be going with him in the morning, though on foot. The only thorn in his reflections was that hat. How could a decent fellow stoop to wear it?

CHAPTER XVIII

THAT hat worried Limpidus whenever they approached a town or entered a respectable hotel; but in the intervals he quite forgot it, so interested and at times irritated was he by Carillion's conversation. He had never dreamt that walking could be entertainment, but Carillion really made it so for many days. It was pleasant to be in the society of one who thought him destined for the highest honours; though occasionally Limpidus half suspected George of only fooling him.

'If I were half as clever as you are,' he said modestly, 'I might be sure of being something in the world.'

'Oh, no!' said George. 'I'm hopeless. I have intellect; and I also have a conscience which forbids me to devote my life to things which I cannot take seriously.'

'I don't see what you mean,' said Limpidus severely. 'I don't see anything to laugh at in time-honoured institutions. And I think the finest thing a man can do is to keep the country going and all that.'

'I've had it dinned into me ever since I was a babe in arms. But it's no use, I'm hopeless,' said Carillion sadly.

Limpidus eyed his friend with something of the pity that he felt for men, like Galloway, well qualified by nature, yet debarred from life. The bar in George's case was not of birth or poverty. Somehow, as he looked compassionately at the laughing cynic, he thought that it had some connection with that ghastly hat.

'I'll make a grave confession to you, Limpy,' said Carillion. 'I trust that it will not destroy our friendship. I would much rather associate with people of intelligence—artists, literary men, or utter nobodies—than with persons like ourselves.'

'Good God!' said Limpidus.

Old George had always been regarded as quite mad; and so he was; and that unhallowed hat was the expression of his madness.

At Munich, where they spent ten days, Carillion knew some artists and musicians with whom he spent a good deal of his time in beer-gardens. And Limpidus went with him for experience. The beer was good. It alone made the conversation tolerable. The music he was forced to bear, the pictures he was forced to look at, caused him to groan 'Good Lord!' within himself, though he was fond of music and of pictures of another kind. Carillion praised his manner with the artists as exactly right—'a graceful touch of deference to genius, a little air of general bewilderment tending to admiration, but still uninstructed, the pleasant manner of a potentate unbending in congenial, if unusual, company.'

'Oh, shut up!' murmured Limpidus. 'But they are awful, really.' He alluded to the outward aspect of the men of genius. So awful were they that Carillion's hat seemed British by comparison. Beholding worse examples of the same degraded type of head-dress upon every head. Limpidus was becoming almost reconciled to it, almost at times ashamed of his own faultless covering, self-conscious as if flung amid a crowd in fancy dress. The horror of Carillion's hat kept dwindling in his mind till he had almost formed the wish to have one like it.

They went to Karlsbad. At the railway station there were Carillion's relations—the duke and the duchess, Lady Gwendolen. The duke was wearing such another hat; at sight of which Limpidus felt positive disgust of his own headgear. He went and bought a fashionable one that very day.

It was in that hat that he again proposed to Lady Gwendolen. It happened on the day following a royal ball at which they both had figured; for Limpidus had been caught up in a whirl of gaiety, and had suddenly become hail-fellow-well-met with half the lesser royalties of Europe.

They had ridden out into the forest with a party of the most illustrious visitors whom that season had bestowed upon the watering-place—men and women who had never in their lives done anything—and, being the youngest members of the party, galloped on ahead. Limpidus put his question very simply. Gwendolen answered: 'Yes, I think so—now.' She waited for a moment, and then added: 'I want to be quite honest. I am not in love with you. But you interest me a great deal more than you used to do. I confess I used to think that there was nothing in you. But that scandal with the little actress made me hopeful. And my cousin, George Carillion, always declared that you would make a name. I shouldn't like to marry a nonentity, however gorgeous. The man I choose must make a reputation for himself either in war or politics or literature or art.'

'Oh, Lord!' groaned Limpidus within his soul, remembering the artists he had seen at Munich; but aloud he said: 'I've often thought of writing. I've got a lot of good things in my head.'

'Oh, do !' said Gwendolen. 'Write poetry—to me !'

'I don't think I could run to that.'

'Well, write a book and dedicate it to me.'

'I will, by Gad !' said Limpidus, spurred by the look she gave him to something like enthusiasm for the project.

The duchess was prepared for the betrothal. The duke, informed, gave it as his opinion that 'Gwen had done a good thing for herself.' It was agreed that the young couple could afford to wait till Limpidus had done his travels, and till the scandal of the actress had blown over. Having arranged a dignified and comfortable future, Gwendolen was in no hurry; and Limpidus, who held the view that marriage sobered a man down, looked forward to a year of freedom as due compensation for a life of marital fidelity. The Karlsbad season ended in due course. The duke and duchess carried Gwen to England. Limpidus (the faithful Glubber always in attendance) went with Carillion to Vienna and saw more of the Bohemian world, which tired him by its lack of dignity after a while. He could not see what George found pleasant in it. It seemed to him a make-believe at handsome life, without the things which make life handsome—wealth and station.

Carillion talked about another walking tour with a positively frightful looking light of literature. That was too much for Limpidus. He chanced to meet a man he knew in the Embassy, who introduced him to an aspect of Vienna more congenial to him, and brought him into touch with decent Englishmen, who played their games, and shot and hunted as at home. That foreigners had no idea of sport they all agreed. One of them was going to Italy, and Limpidus decided to go with him.

They were at Florence at the season of the carnival, and, carrying introductions to a great Italian family, were taken to the heart of all the gaiety. At a Veglione Ball, in the great theatre, Limpidus was insulted by an officer unknown to him, for reasons which he did not understand. It had to do with an Italian girl whom Limpidus, at her request, had taken down to dance in the arena. Every one was in a domino, which made it more bewildering.

The officer, after jabbering at him, struck him in the face. Limpidus put up his fists, but men restrained him. He was told that he must fight a duel or else leave the city in disgrace. So he told his friend to make arrangements for the meeting, which took place at daybreak on a hill across the Arno. Limpidus considered the whole thing a dreadful bore, and told himself that his opponent was quite mad. Feeling unable to eat anything before the combat, he made Glubber carry bottled beer and sandwiches to the place of meeting in a Gladstone bag. Shots were exchanged, and he was wounded in the arm. The officer declared his honour satisfied. Then Limpidus sat down upon the ground, the Gladstone bag was opened, and he drank his beer and ate his sandwiches, inviting all the foreigners to do the same. They got excited, gathered round him, even tried to kiss him, in their foolish way. His friend, who understood Italian, told him they admired his courage, which astonished Limpidus, who had not been afraid, because it never occurred to him as possible that Providence would let a decent Englishman be killed by an Italian monkey. He had some faith in Providence, he told his friend. The story of his coolness, widely circulated, made him a lion for the soft Italian ladies.

He went to Rome for Easter, then to Greece. The British Minister at Athens was his cousin. There he found men with whom he went out shooting over classic heights, and girls with whom he flirted in the Parthenon, or played lawn tennis at the foot of Mount Hymettus, or swam in the blue waters of the gulf. He stayed there, with some long excursions, till October, when he went to Egypt.

He shot wild duck in sight of famous temples, and quail within the shadow of the pyramids. He bought some Arab ponies, and played polo. Then he went on to Palestine, passed through Jerusalem, and had a shot at wild boar in the Jordan valley; thence on to Asia Minor, where the sport was better, but the conditions much too rough for his idea of pleasure. He was taken prisoner by brigands, which was disagreeable because, mistaking Glubber for a person of condition, they kept him under separate guard, so that he could not bring the shaving-water and the early cup of tea which were necessities of life to Limpidus. The brigands only kept them for the time required to send an emissary into Smyrna for two hundred pounds. The sum appeared so moderate to Limpidus that he bestowed upon the brigand chief a Colt revolver, a present which completely won the ruffian's heart. They parted as the best of friends, with bows and smiles.

At Constantinople he visited a mosque or two, and rode once round the walls. He found the city picturesque but dull, and wondered how the Turks survived without the drink which he himself imbibed each evening with a group of decent Englishman who kept aloof from the base mercantile Levantine crowd at Pera. It pleased him to observe how they had made themselves respected.

He played lawn tennis, bowls, and, in the evening, bridge with the same group, and, now and then, some highly-favoured member of a foreign embassy. He visited the lowest haunts of Galata as he had visited the lowest haunts of Cairo, Smyrna, and Vienna, as he had made a point of visiting the lowest haunts of every city in his travels. A brief liaison with an American grass-widow on the Nile, a fortnight of infatuation with a lady who proclaimed herself the widow of a Bulgarian prime minister, and by her beauty fairly roused the decent English at Constantinople—these were his avowable amours until he went to Russia. He never for a moment lost the sense, with which he had set out, of representing England; never forgot the charge his father had imposed on him to do nothing unbecoming to an English gentleman. In maintaining that high sense of decency, the sense of Clearfount Abbey, and respectful tenants in the background, he was helped by Glubber, who, whether in Egyptian desert or Tyrolean glade, retained the manner of the well-trained English servant. When he called his master in the morning or laid out his clothes at night, his words and manner were exactly those he would have used at home. Nor was he in the least perturbed by change of scene or foreign customs. Even the brigands failed to shake his equanimity. In the least sophisticated of hotels, or under canvas, he managed somehow to procure the things he needed, and perform his duty in the usual way. Nothing surprised him; nothing much impressed him. He had a poor opinion of all foreign parts and their inhabitants; and so in truth had Limpidus until he came to Russia.

CHAPTER XIX

A RUSSIAN prince, returning to his native land, and pausing at Constantinople on the way, invited Limpidus to go with him and be his guest. The prince had vast estates, a house in Petersburg, a house in Moscow, and did things well; so Limpidus saw Russia splendidly.

Never till then had he considered that any foreign country was a patch on England; but Russia struck him as superior in some respects. It was not the scenery, and it was not the housing; England was superior as far as that. It was the way that things were managed, without bother or formality. In Russia, decent people ruled the roast completely. Everything was run like clockwork upon proper lines. The people knew their place; they were contented, pious, and respectful. If any rascal tried to agitate them and upset them he was put away. And as for sport, the man he stayed with had a forest full of game, strictly preserved, which stretched for fifty miles. His guests were driven out in furs and comfort, with hot-water bottles at their feet and on their knees. They met a host of beaters at a place appointed, and then they got to work with just the spice of danger which gives zest to sport. After enough exertion to provide an appetite they reached a lodge well-warmed, where luncheon was prepared for them, with proper servants waiting, and champagne and decent port. They drove back in the evening to converse with charming women—women with the looks and speech of

ladies and the seductions of the other sort, who all spoke English nearly perfectly. It was like paradise. He went to Moscow, Nijni Novgorod, and Petersburg, always in the same delightful way. The months passed like a happy dream, of which he could not afterwards recall the details, though it left him quite convinced that Russia was the jolliest country outside England, and that Russians were the best of Europeans.

His stay in Russia opened up his mind and gave him new ideas. He talked of earnest matters with the prince and divers ladies. He long remembered a dull afternoon at Petersburg, when he stood at a window with a very pretty woman, watching a great procession, with banners, crosses, and icons, going down the Nevsky Prospekt. There were crowds and crowds of moujiks on their knees.

'Is it not lovely?' sighed the fair one. 'The faith of those poor people! It always makes me wish to cry, it is so beautiful. They love their Czar and their dear Russian Church so much that they will die for them with rapture. It makes them happy in their humble, useful life; a life of sacrifice for us. Oh, how I love them!'

Comparing the radiant beauty at his side with all those rugged faces set in tangled locks, Limpidus was moved to say:

'It's jolly good of you to feel like that. Do they deserve it?'

'Oh, indeed they do. You do not know the goodness of our Russian folk.'

'Our poor people in England aren't religious like that,' said Limpidus regretfully. 'They talk about their rights, and make a devil of a fuss.'

'Their rights—poor creatures!' said the lovely Russian.

He long remembered, too, a certain evening in a well-warmed country house, when he and his kind host had sat up late over a bottle of grand whisky, discussing the whole state of Europe and the world at large. The Russ explained it far more clearly than Limpidus had ever dreamt that it could be explained. The coolness between England and his country worried him. He had a passionate regard for England, and he wished to see her in alliance with his country. What stood in the way? Only the moribund and inefficient Turkish Empire. England and Russia had the same religion; their churches could unite with gain to both. And then how quickly they could Christianise the world! What was required to make such union possible? Merely the sacrifice of Turkey. Russia must have a large part of the Turkish Empire. He gave reasons which to Limpidus appeared conclusive. Russia was no unprogressive, barbarous country, as many of the English seemed to think. Limpidus had seen for himself, their railways, their street-lighting, postal arrangements, style of living, could compare with those of any country in the world. And whatever might be said about their government, it was efficient, not like the Turkish government, which let the people all run wild.

'The man who set you all against us was a Jew,' the prince informed him in conclusion. 'No doubt he was amused to set two Christian nations by the ears, to benefit the Musulman. A Jew and a Musulman is practically the same thing. If we could come together we should be invincible. With our united Church we'd show the world what Christian progress really is. I

don't dislike the Turk. He has the manners of a gentleman. But he's a d——d unsociable fellow, for he doesn't drink.'

Thus rounding off his exposition with a joke, the prince emptied a tumbler three parts filled with whisky neat. The stuff these Russians drank without turning a hair filled Limpidus with admiration. He supposed it was the climate, for he had found that he himself could carry more in Russia than he could at home. But now he was a little thick of speech. He thanked his host most earnestly for making the position clear to him. He would remember always all that he had said that night.

'I see it all as clear as daylight. We must come together. The Turk's no good to any one, he doesn't drink—ha, ha !' said Limpidus, and then he added very solemnly : 'You and I are better. We're'—a hiccup—Christians.'

CHAPTER XX

WHEN Limpidus returned to England his sister had been six months married to Lord Eustace Smith, and had already tired of that good-looking imbecile. Sir Rusticus was worried over her affairs. Agatha was too adventurous; he feared a scandal; and he was glad to have his son at home again to comfort and support him.

'Now you're prepared to settle down, I hope, and begin life in earnest,' he exclaimed. 'Gwendolen's been staying with us. She expects great things of you.'

'I know,' said Limpidus, a little ruefully. 'She expects a devil of a lot. . . . To begin with, I intend to write a book. I've seen some funny places off the beaten track; and, for one thing, very few Englishmen have seen as much as I have of the inner life of Russia.'

'It's a country I don't like,' remarked Sir Rusticus.

'You would, though, if you knew it,' replied Limpidus with warmth. 'A ripping country full of jolly people! The feeling here against it is all rubbish. That's why I feel I ought to write a book. It will astonish Gwen.'

'And me,' his father added. 'I am pleased. I never thought my son would write a book. I'll buy a hundred copies, and distribute 'em among the Rads who think the landed gentry have no brains. . . . And when are you and Gwen going to be married? The sooner the better, I should say. I see no reason to postpone it any longer.'

'I want to write this book first,' murmured Limpidus. 'I should like her to know I can do something.'

'Well, that won't take long, will it? A few weeks, I suppose, will settle that.'

'Yes, I suppose so. But then there's the job of publishing.'

'Well, say three months,' agreed Sir Rusticus. 'I'll see the duke. The engagement should be publicly announced at once.'

Limpidus did really wish to write a book about the wealth and charms of Russia, which, with the idea that Christians ought to hold together, had taken hold upon a brain by nature obstinate. He also wished to put off matrimony for a while. He had come back from his year of wandering with mind awakened to possibilities of pleasure in our English life which he had not suspected when he set out on his travels. He wished to show his new-found knowledge to his friends, wanted a few good weeks of fun with them before his light went out for ever. He stipulated for six months, and in the end obtained it.

He had not anticipated any difficulty in composing. But after working a whole morning at his chambers, racking his brains for something worth inscribing, he found that he had written but a score of words—and crossed them out—when Glubber came to warn him of the luncheon hour. He swore at that devoted servant, and then asked, with bitter irony:—

'Glubber, did you ever try to write a book?'

The man's reply was guarded: 'Not as I'm aware of, sir.'

'Well, if you were going to write one, how would you begin?'

Glubber meditated for a moment.

'I can't be positive; but I think, sir, I should plan it out beforehand. I should write out what I should call a table of contents first, sir.'

'Suppose it was a book about our travels?'

'Well, sir, I should begin by saying how we started off from London with Sir Barnet, and how we got to Paris and to Switzerland. That would be Chapter I. Chapter II. would be about the mountains and them climbing people. And Chapter III. them German places we visited along with Mr George Carillion. I should take each different sight and foreign creature according as we met them, sir, and write them down under the chapter where I meant to put them.'

'I see,' said Limpidus. 'I wish to God you had to write the book instead of me.'

'I doubt if I could do it, sir,' said Glubber modestly.

Acting on Glubber's hint, Limpidus planned out the contents of the first ten chapters that same afternoon, and then went out in search of recreation, feeling he had worked.

A few days later, he sat down before a pile of foolscap, intending to begin the actual narrative. Again he was completely at a loss. He called in Glubber, who helped him with suggestions so that he wrote a good deal of the first chapter. Reading each sentence out to Glubber eased the work; and Glubber's 'That don't sound quite right, sir, not to me,' was inoffensive, being merely a respectful echo of his own opinion. Master and man thenceforth collaborated, and the book progressed. But the six weeks he had judged sufficient had expired before they got to Chapter VIII.

Then George Carillion called one day, and Limpidus

informed him with some pride that he was writing a book about Russia.

'That's capital!' exclaimed the visitor, so cordially that Limpidus felt moved to read some extracts.

George sprawled in an arm-chair, his feet upon the mantelpiece, smoking a cigar, while Limpidus went bravely through the finished portion of the manuscript—bravely, because, after the first few lines, he was aware that it was fustian stuff, and must seem shocking to a critic like Carillion.

When he had finished reading, he sat silent, expecting condemnation. But George did not condemn the work wholesale.

'It's not so bad,' he said. 'The trouble is that you tell people only what they know already, and in language which they've heard a million times. Your stuff is all clichés. If I were you, I should start by cutting out the descriptions of scenery. The world is sick of "fleecy cloudlets" and "the azure main." Then I should very much curtail the part before you get to Russia. Indeed, I think that I should cut that too. You want to concentrate on Russia. And I think you ought to tell your readers something of the history of the country, and the doctrines of the Church; and give statistics of the population, trade, mineral wealth, and so on, either in the book itself or in an appendix.'

'But I know nothing of all that,' said Limpidus, disgusted.

'You're young; you don't know everything, but you can learn.'

'But it would take me all my time, and bore me horribly.'

'Well, you are a rich man. There are competent and

learned authors here in London who would gladly do the boring part for you.'

'I've a jolly good mind to tear the whole thing up,' said Limpidus despairingly.

But he did not do that. After a few days of comparative despondency, he went and called upon his old friend Galloway, and asked his help. Galloway at the time was very busy as the secretary of an organisation for relieving the necessities of members of the Irish aristocracy, robbed of their means through troubles in that country. 'But I know just the man for you,' he said, 'an Irishman who has lived a lot in Russia, so poor that he'll be glad of anything you choose to give him; an educated man and a good writer. Drinks, I fancy.'

Galloway took a card out of a pigeon-hole and scribbled down the Irishman's address.

'I only want him to assist me with the heavy work, like looking up statistics,' murmured Limpidus.

The book was finished in four months, and Limpidus was both surprised and pleased with it. The style was pleasant. There were even passages which made the author laugh. He read a few of them aloud to Glubber, who was much amused. And everything he meant to say upon Great Britain's policy was lucidly set forth. He had certainly done something to astonish Gwendolen. When this was published, all the world would know him for a young man to be reckoned with, an intellectual giant of the ruling class. And it was with the consciousness of high achievement, well-earned relaxation, that he went down to a certain house of gay repute, in Gloucestershire, to which he had been invited by a friend, who told him : 'They asked me to bring anybody decent, and it's rather fun.'

The people of the house were parvenus, extremely rich, and just a trifle vulgar. They dealt in rowdy parties; and provided pretty girls of their own sort who abandoned themselves to the uproarious spirit of the place. In the evenings, men and maidens romped together like what they were—young, healthy, well-fed animals, a little drunk, for wines and spirits flowed like water.

The ladies were, from Limpidus's point of view, impossible; and so he failed to realise that they were dangerous. One night when all the men were going up to bed, the girls came out in night array, with pillows, and attacked them. A close fight ensued. Limpidus pursued a black-haired girl into her room, and there remained, arranging terms of peace. The hostess, going round to see that all was well, was shocked to find him in her niece's bedroom. The black-haired damsel was her niece. Limpidus fled before her stern appearance.

In the morning, the said hostess and her husband interviewed him, threatening to make things hot for him unless he made their niece his wife without delay.

Limpidus was not a coward, but he trembled in his shoes on that occasion; seeing the whole social structure menaced in his person. He was abject in apology; he swore that there was nothing wrong; it had only been a bit of fun to scare a girl who had been cheeky to him. When they still insisted, he had sense enough not to refuse outright. He asked for time. They granted him a week in which to think it over. If, at the end of the week, they had not heard from him, the story would be published.

Limpidus went at once to Clearfount and made a clean breast of the whole business to his father, who, good

fellow that he was, did not waste time upon reproaches which help no one. The trouble was, of course, with Lady Gwendolen and her people. 'It is better to be honest with them,' said Sir Rusticus. 'The duke has been in far worse messes in his day.' So to the duke he went with the whole story, taking with him his unlucky son as evidence. His grace was first amused, and then, when they explained to him its bearing on his daughter's matrimonial prospects, a good deal worried by the incident. The duchess was called in. She was exceedingly annoyed, but set her nimble wits to work to help them.

Three days before the week of grace expired, the Duchess of Beams herself went down to the gay house in Gloucestershire, and interviewed the joyous parvenus who 'kept' it—her own word. What she said or did to them was never known, but they were thenceforth of the duchess's avowed acquaintance, and Limpidus was told they had forgiven him.

The only serious consequence of the adventure to him was that it made the duchess hasten on her daughter's marriage. He was sorry to be cheated of some days of precious liberty. And he was more than half afraid of Gwendolen. He thought of himself as a living sacrifice upon the altar of the Name, the Country, and the Property. There was a stupid ceremony to be endured, which the joking of his friends made more distasteful. Carillion was to be best man. Satan and Stinker promised to support him. Poor Galloway was going to be present at the bride's request.

His book appeared three days before the wedding. It filled him with delight—a handsome volume, bound in scarlet cloth, bearing his name in golden letters on

the cover. There were illustrations—portraits of the Czar, the Procurator of the Holy Synod, ecclesiastics, various peasant types; also a map of Russia with the corn-lands, forests, and the parts where there were minerals differentiated in the colouring. He sent a copy off at once to Gwendolen. He was an author, so no longer feared his bride-to-be. He had done something.

When he was getting ready to go down to Dewby for the ceremony, the Irishman who had assisted him to write the book called on him at his chambers in a state of wild excitement.

‘Have you seen this, by any chance? It’s grand!’ he cried. ‘Four columns full of glorious, undiluted praise. See here: “the gifted author”—“this illuminating work.” You’ve made your name, and I congratulate you. Let me shake your hand.’

‘I have to thank you a good deal, you know,’ said Limpidus good-naturedly. ‘It wouldn’t have been half so good without your help.’

CHAPTER XXI

THE honeymoon was spent at an old Tudor mansion in the Midlands, lent for the purpose by an uncle of the bride. Gwendolen had spent a portion of her childhood there, and knew every man, woman, and child about the place.

There was a lake meandering through scented thickets, on which they spent a good deal of their time together. Gwendolen proved more companionable than the bridegroom had expected, and much more attractive. Still, he agreed in secret, when she put it forward as an axiom preliminary to the peace which should exist between them, that they were not in love with one another; though he thought it necessary to protest gallantly: 'Speak for yourself.'

They were together in the punt. Gwendolen had the pole, and Limpidus was lying on the cushions. A goodly luncheon basket, provided by attentive, even anxious, servants of the house, had just been emptied.

'But it is true, isn't it?' the bride exclaimed. 'We have agreed to live together and behave correctly. But we don't pretend that we are all the world to one another. You have your friends and interests, and I have mine. Mother gave me a good lecture on my wifely duties. I was not to mind if you turned out a pig in some ways. She said all men were that. And I want to tell you that I don't mind what you do, so long as you preserve the decencies. I mean to go my own way, too.'

But Limpidus could not assent to such a compact, at any rate in words. Whatever might be in his heart, he much preferred to keep it there, illicit. He would always disavow it in plain speech. To acknowledge its existence openly, to speak of it with Gwendolen, would be indecent. Besides, whatever she might say or think, he was sufficiently in love with her to make him wish to keep her for himself exclusively. So he protested, saying :—

‘I am not an utter beast ! . . . While a fellow’s single, he does play the fool a bit; but when he’s married he gives up all that, unless he’s a most utter blackguard.’

Gwendolen’s laugh expressed most wicked incredulity.

‘I’ve heard something,’ she said, ‘about your “playing the fool,” as you call it. . . . Suppose a certain Russian lady were to come to England, would you give her up?’

‘Who told you that?’ said Limpidus, with crimson face. ‘It’s a damned lie. There’s absolutely nothing in it.’

‘Oh, isn’t there?’ said Gwendolen derisively. ‘How disappointing ! I do so love romance of all descriptions, even when the subject happens to be fat and forty, and everybody’s property—to boot.’

‘She isn’t fat,’ said Limpidus indignantly. ‘And as for everybody’s property, I swear she’s not !’

‘You needn’t get upset,’ she chuckled merrily. ‘I’m not the least bit jealous of her, only interested. Suppose you give me now a full and true account of all the ladies you have known so intimately. It would help our understanding and would pass the time.’

‘You mustn’t talk like that. It isn’t done,’ said Limpidus severely.

‘So sorry if I’ve shocked you, dear ! We’ll change the

subject. Suppose you tell me Russian stories quite apart from women, like those you put in that delightful book. I love that one about the pope who stole the icon. Tell me some more like that, and I'll be good.'

Gwendolen was in a froward mood that afternoon. He knew that she did not believe the book was his, did not ascribe to him so large a part in it as he could truly claim. She had even forced him to confess, at times when confidences seem the natural thing, that he had obtained some help from friends when writing it. That anecdote of the pope and the icon was a humorous interpolation of the Irishman, who had it from a friend well up in Russian folk-lore. Yet she must needs choose that particular yarn for admiration, and ask for more of the same kind.

He took refuge in a serious air, and earnest tone, spoke gravely of the greatness of the Russian Empire, the power and splendour of the Russian Church, the passionate devotion of the Russian people to their 'little father,' the destiny of Russia to evangelise the peoples of the East, and the terrible mistake the British Government had made in opposing that great civilising influence, and treating its enlightened progress as a danger. All these were things which he had said so often since his home-coming, that they had acquired the form he loved, the weight of platitudes. Gwendolen listened to him patiently.

'Of course I don't agree or disagree with you. I can't, for I know nothing of the subject,' she remarked when he had done. 'You shall take me to Russia some day and introduce me to all your friends there. Don't be alarmed! I shan't scratch anybody.'

Their *tête-à-tête* might be occasionally embarrassing, occasionally irritating to the bridegroom; it was never

dull. It was with no yawning of relief that he returned to social life, but stimulated as from a course of training. She had made the terms of their relation clear to him; the terms were easy; and though he had refused expressly to subscribe to them, he accepted the convention in his heart. They were bound together by the wealth and name they had in common. Their duty to the property, the country, and the name must be performed. She was prepared to bear his children and protect his honour, so long as he on his side did not bring disgrace. He had ambition—that she recognised—and she was quite prepared to help him to the utmost of her social influence. So long as he kept on advancing towards a reputable goal, and was careful to maintain their common dignity, he might amuse himself in any way he pleased.

The permission, though it reassured him, shocked him greatly, for he held that marriage was a solemn institution, which, like other solemn institutions, should be bolstered up.

CHAPTER XXII

WITHIN a few months of his marriage, Limpidus found himself in the diplomatic service. I say 'found himself' advisedly, for neither he nor anybody else could have explained exactly how he came to be there. He had been through no examination, though he had survived some interviews, in one of which a great man had observed to him: 'You speak French, don't you?' Upon his saying 'Yes,' the great man nodded and went on to talk about the Ascot chances. His heritage of £70,000 a year and his possession of the daughter of a duke, were held, perhaps, to qualify him as a representative of England, no less than would the writing of a précis or the spelling from dictation of a foreign tongue. Anyhow, there he was, a junior member of the diplomatic service. And he was appointed to the place of his desire, St Petersburg. As a Russophil, and author of a well-known book, he was received as something of a personage upon his own account. He and his wife were petted by society; and Gwendolen began to study Russian literature.

It was at Petersburg that their first child was born—a boy named Alexander as a compliment to the Imperial house, and Limpidus in honour of his father. He was provided with two English nurses from his birth, and in a few months was taken home to England, to Clearfount Abbey, to delight his father's aunts. Clearfount was to be the receptacle of all the children of Limpidus and Lady Gwendolen as they arrived.

Limpidus liked diplomacy. He looked in at the Embassy each morning, to sit upon a table and be told the news. The remainder of his duty was entirely social, and Gwendolen, when well, did more than half of it. He thus had ample leisure for his own amusement, which also might be said to have a diplomatic character, since it led him into circles where he met diplomatists. A loan of one great country to another, it was said, had been arranged in the boudoir of an actress, and a treaty of alliance had been settled over steaming tumblers in a well-known haunt of golden-crested nightbirds. Limpidus was so discreet and moderate in dissipation that even Lady Gwendolen accepted his amusements under the general heading of diplomacy.

He was astonished when he realised how little the mere facts of being married and a father had deformed his life. He had his separate suite of rooms where he was waited on by Glubber as of old. He seldom saw his wife before the luncheon hour, not always then if they had separate engagements. They usually came together about tea-time, and remained inseparable in their social functions till, say, half-past ten at night, when Limpidus would slip away to his own cronies.

Marriage had added greatly to his social dignity, without diminishing his freedom to seek private pleasures. The two years which he spent at St Petersburg were happy, profitable years, in which he learnt without an effort the whole business of diplomacy. He was able to assume at will the solemn, slightly frowning brow which masks vacuity, the guarded speech which hides the lack of knowledge and of thought. He knew that the best way to defeat a rival's curiosity and draw his information upon any subject, was to be absolutely ignorant of

that subject, while pretending to know all about it. It was an affair of manner and of settled formulas, a purely conventional employment suited to his temperament. He knew that he was not required to think; his chief had told him so when he first joined the Embassy. His business was to look the part he had to play, and talk of other things than international affairs.

He gained much in deportment in those years, and even showed a tendency to embonpoint. This slight deformity alarmed him greatly, causing him to have recourse to divers remedies. It made him welcome his recall to England, when it came in an urgent letter from Sir Rusticus, announcing that a general election was in sight, and he must stand for Denderby.

He showed the letter to his chief, who quite agreed with him in thinking it the call of duty. His country claimed him for a harder service; so, with regret, he said farewell to Petersburg.

CHAPTER XXIII

IN the schoolroom of a large village fifteen miles from Clearfount Sir Rusticus was speaking in support of his son's candidature :—

'I am a Liberal of the old school, and my son is a Liberal of the old school. The Conservatives claim to be the country party, but I say that, if you look at the facts, you will find that they have done nothing for the agriculturist or yet for agriculture. They say that they have always stood by the land'—'Stuck to it, you mean!' somebody interrupted—'but what have they done to help the farmer or the agricultural labourer? Nothing. Now I will tell you what we have done.'

He did so at some length.

'I am not one to split a hair in my opinions. I accept the Liberal programme as a whole.' (Applause.) 'I say it is a splendid, a progressive programme, which deals with every question in a way which ought to satisfy every honest-minded, loyal Englishman. As for those who want to pull down all those institutions which have made us what we are, and to set up nothing in their place, and stir up strife between the classes, I have nothing to do with them. I believe in give-and-take, good-will, and friendliness. I don't want things to stand still, as the Tories do. But, on the other hand, I'm not an anarchist; I stand for order and for decency. Those chaps who wish to upset everything come from the towns. We in the country know each other better. We've jogged along

together, gentle and simple, for centuries; and we aren't going to fly at each other's throats just because some half-baked, counter-jumping townsman happens to come along and tell us a whole lot of fairy tales.

'For ten years I represented this constituency in Parliament, until I felt the need of a rest, and then my dear old friend, Sir Barnet Veale—whom I am glad to see upon the platform with us here to-night—became your member. And now he feels the need of rest; and it was, I understand, at his suggestion that the Liberal Association wrote and asked my son here to come forward as a candidate. He had a good position in the diplomatic service; he and his wife were enjoying themselves in St Petersburg; but he came at once and so did she, God bless her! at the call of the dear old country. That is enough to tell you that he has your interests at heart, as his father and his grandfather had before him. And let me tell you he's a bigger man than any of us, though he's young; for he's written a book—a thundering good book, though I say it—about Russia.'

Sir Rusticus sat down amid stentorian applause. Sir Barnet followed with a complimentary little speech, in the course of which he reminded Limpidus of their companionship amid the Alpine snows, and his audience of the debt of gratitude the county owed to Clearfount Abbey. He did not, any more than did the previous speaker, fear the machinations of the Tories, who, if they had had any manners or any patriotism would not have opposed the election of a Fitz-Bearé for Denderby.

Limpidus, who had been sitting with a grave, collected air, exchanging an occasional remark with Galloway who sat behind him, rose at length. The yokels thumped

their sticks upon the ground and roared. He took the questions which were before the country one by one, explaining them in simple but quite polished language. Once he forgot his point and turned to Galloway who prompted him at once. The speech was a success. The call for questions evoked nothing but compliments and promises of support, till one got up and said :—

‘Do I understand as the young gentleman is in favour o’ these Russians, because I don’t hold with ’em. And it’s my opinion as it’d be a bad day for England if they was to come along.’

A sympathetic murmur in the audience told of popular misgiving on this point.

‘But—er—you entirely misunderstand me,’ answered Limpidus. ‘My only wish is to bring about friendly relations with Russia, to—er—come to an understanding—er—to prevent war.’

‘Let them give up their dirty ’abits,’ some one cried.

Limpidus was going to defend his idol, when a whisper came from Galloway : ‘Don’t argue with them ! You’ve said quite enough.’

The chairman, who was a local builder, asked :—

‘Any more questions?’

And then a real opponent rose—a thin, pale-faced young man, who leaned against the wall and spoke with strange facility. At first they thought he was a Tory, and so listened warily. But soon it was apparent that he was a crank—one of those lunatics who wish to alter everything—and there were angry cries of ‘Order’ and ‘Sit down.’ The chairman cried, ‘I asked for questions, not for speeches.’

‘Well, I’m coming to the question,’ said the pale-faced man, no whit abashed. ‘Would it not, in the

opinion of the candidate, be more in accordance with the spirit of English liberty, which he so much admires, if the people of this and every other constituency were allowed to choose their representative instead of having two of their oppressors foisted on them by the Liberal Association and the Conservative Association——' The rest of his remarks were drowned in a great uproar, in the middle of which the national anthem was played.

That meeting was typical of any number of meetings, except for the disturbance at the end. There was generally no disturbance and no opposition; nothing but a rustic, crass enthusiasm, which suggested beer.

Limpidus acquitted himself well. He caught the manner and demeanour of the public speaker to perfection; and the catchwords of the Party programme soon fell naturally from his lips. Galloway composed his speeches for him, and coached him thoroughly in their delivery beforehand, even providing him with smart replies to possible objections. Limpidus dreaded hecklers. The need to answer with politeness insolence which should be punished with the horsewhip, seemed to him degrading. He thought the franchise of the lower classes an immense mistake. But there it was, and so he had to make the best of it.

In the intervals he shot and hunted and enjoyed himself. There were some jolly girls among his canvassers, whose help and admiration fortified him. It was pleasant to be listened to and cheered and fêted and to feel that he was doing something to preserve the country. He owed a lot to Galloway, he quite admitted, as knights of old owed much to their esquires. But Galloway was paid for what he did, so could not claim a share in the success of Limpidus.

The only serious opposition to the Liberal candidate was in the large town of the district—a place of fifteen thousand inhabitants, which twenty years before had been a little village. Its rapid growth was due to the discovery of minerals. A majority of the population were nominally Liberals, but many of them, it was said, would vote Conservative, through hatred of a county family like the Fitz-Beares.

By the advice of the Liberal agent, Limpidus left this disaffected region to his local supporters, as far as canvassing and speeches went, until the last three days, when he concentrated all his powers upon it, addressing an almost continuous succession of meetings till they seemed alike to him, the people puppets and the phrases, which he kept repeating, magical to draw applause from wooden images.

Then there was a good deal of the heckling he so much detested, and even with Galloway at hand he came off badly, for his anger rose at such presumption. His supporters by their shouting and their ready fists achieved a victory which he himself could never have attained by words. There was an evil, revolutionary spirit in the place which horrified him. A lot of rogues who wished to do away with everything, heckled alike Conservative and Liberal. Limpidus would have liked to hang the lot of them. But, as it was, they were at large, and numerous enough to cause annoyance. Having been roughly ejected from some meetings, they were also angry.

On the day before the poll, when the whole Clearfount party drove in state into the town, mud mixed with stones was thrown at all the carriages, breaking the glass and spattering the dress and faces of some ladies,

including Lady Gwendolen and Miss Dolores Clare. The latter's cheek was cut.

The candidate received the tidings of this outrage just as he was going to speak. 'I should like to tell the scoundrels what I think of them,' he said to Galloway. 'I've a jolly good mind to chuck the whole thing up. When decent people take the trouble to come all this way—a devilish pretty woman like Miss Clare!—it's beastly! I should like to have the whipping of those brutes.'

Galloway urged him to keep cool and on no account to allude to the incident from the platform. And Limpidus went through the first part of the meeting with his usual suavity, wooing the electors in accustomed words, recited with the usual accent of intense sincerity. But when it was the time for questions, and a man got up expressing in no measured terms an opposite opinion, Limpidus took him for a stone-thrower (though the man was a respectable Conservative), and told him what he thought of him and all his kind. Galloway's whisper of 'Sit down' was quite unheeded till the speaker had exhausted all the words which came to him. And they were words which sounded odd at such a meeting—the simple, heartfelt language of the public schools—contrasting strangely with his previous speeches, and showing up their artificiality. Those words were the expression of a natural enmity, so natural that the audience applauded wildly.

When Limpidus sat down after that outburst, the meeting was no longer manageable; no other speaker could obtain a hearing, and the chairman shortly brought it to an end.

'I'm sorry,' said the candidate, 'I couldn't hold myself.'

'It was a pity,' answered Galloway. 'But I'm glad it didn't happen earlier in the campaign, before they got to know you.'

'I don't believe it would have made a scrap of difference,' said Limpidus superbly. 'They respect the family too much—the decent part of them—to question any blessed thing I choose to do. And he hurried off to offer sympathy and consolation to Miss Dolores Clare, whose cheek was cut.

On polling day he made three speeches at three different points in the constituency—grave, patriotic speeches, calculated to efface the queer impression caused by his outbreak of the night before. A fourth, the crowning speech of all, was made from the balcony of the town hall of Denderby at ten o'clock at night. A vast crowd of people, some with torches, filled the market square.

He thanked them for the honour done to him that day. He was glad to be their member as his father and grandfather had been before him. He hoped to prove himself in all ways worthy of their confidence. It was the proudest moment of his life. A graceful reference to Lady Gwendolen, who stood beside him, evoked rousing cheers. And then he shouted: 'I thank you from the bottom of my heart.'

The speech was a success. Even to the graceful reference to Lady Gwendolen, even to 'I thank you from the bottom of my heart,' word for word, it was the work of Galloway; and Limpidus was glad to think that he had got it pat.

CHAPTER XXIV

'SATAN's in for Halifax.'

'I know, I saw him just this minute, in the lobby.'

'Hallo, Stinker! It's ages since I saw your ugly features. Stop fooling, you benighted ass!'—Stinker had assaulted his insulter deftly in the region of the waistcoat—'Look at the Limpet, silent and tenacious. I say, Limpy, who wrote that rotten book for you? I couldn't have written it myself, so I am prepared to swear you never wrote it. . . . No end of a swell, old Limpy, nowadays! Looks down on all of us. One of the coming glories of his sickening party—What? . . . Hallo, Maggot, where do you spring from? You're not a member, are you? Well, I'm damned! Is there really in all England a constituency so degraded as to elect you with your dirty habits and your sickly smile?'

A dapper little man, of ape-like ugliness, grinned full acceptance of these compliments while shaking hands to right and left.

'Have you seen old George? He looks as mournful as an owl.'

'Carillion?'

'Yes, he's in for some place in the north—miners or cotton-spinners, I forget which. Over two thousand majority—good old George.'

'Well, that's the last straw. He's as mad as a March hare, absolutely full of new ideas. But we shall have some fun occasionally.'

'It's going to be an awful bore,' said one tall, languid youth, almost an albino in appearance, putting up a monocle. 'Just in the huntin' season, too.'

'Oh, don't you worry, Ferret. You can pair with Limpy.'

'I say, have any of you fellows seen a Labour member—the very latest freak? I can show you six or seven of them in a bunch. A gruesome sight! Such hair, such accents! Come and have a look!'

'Poor devils! They will have a time,' said Ferret feelingly, as one who, for his own part, meant to give it them.

'They jolly well deserve it, pushing in where they've no business. What do they know about the country?' answered Stinker.

A group of old schoolfellows, all new members of the House of Commons, had foregathered on the opening day of Parliament, while waiting for the Speaker to go in; and Limpidus was in its midst, an object of much chaff because he was a Liberal. The group increased in size with every minute. Satan appeared, and then came George Carillion and many a familiar face unseen for years. There were schoolboy jokes and insults and much laughter in an undertone, for all were conscious of being in the position of new boys at school.

Limpidus was talking to Carillion when some one smote him on the back violently, commanding, 'Stop that noise!' He turned and saw a frowning, furious face, and he had murmured 'Sorry' half unconsciously before, the frown relaxing to a grin, he recognised the face as that of dear old Chops.

'You must treat me with respect; I'm an old member. Have you bagged your seats?' said Chops, who looked

important, carrying a lot of papers. 'Good old George! I want to have a talk to you. See you at tea-time. Ta-ta, Limpy!' And off he went to join some other friends.

The new members were all feeling rather nervous. That was why they clung together in a mass. When a policeman suddenly vociferated: 'Hats off, strangers!' more than one of them removed his hat in great alarm. Limpidus informed them: 'We're not strangers. We're members, so we have the right to keep our hats on.'

'Good old Limpy! He knows all about it, naturally,' some one chuckled.

When they trooped into the House after the Speaker's procession, the ceremony still further intimidated most of them. Even Limpidus, who had the best opinion of himself, and looked upon pre-eminence in that assembly as his birthright, knew by tea-time that it would require some courage to stand up and speak. Most of his friends were of the same opinion, and so strongly that they swore never to speak at all, but only vote. That was the simplest way, and Limpidus was tempted by it, though in his heart he knew that he could not adhere to it. He felt that he was bound to make his mark. Gwendolen would see to that; and he possessed a valuable aid in Galloway, who, at any rate, would see that he did not disgrace himself.

He was confirmed in this opinion and encouraged by a summons from the party leader, who spoke to him as to a man from whom he hoped great things.

'You stand a good chance of distinction,' the great man informed him. 'You are young, but you have written a book of serious import on a subject in which many members of the House are deeply interested.

You are the heir to great estates. You have a stake in the country. You are what the House considers as a solid man; and, if you choose, you can rise to almost any height. The House will always listen to a man like you.

'There are two ways in which a member of the House can serve his party. One is by merely voting and subscribing to the funds. The other is by close attention to affairs and assistance in debate. You can serve us in both ways, so we look upon you as a valuable acquisition. All you have to do at present is to learn the customs of the House. Don't speak until you feel yourself prepared, and let your first speech be upon some subject which you know by heart. We are very glad indeed to have you with us.'

Limpidus felt greatly strengthened by that interview, and also by the kind reception given to him by a group of older members—men who wore a little cross or crucifix upon their watch-chains and (Carillion flippantly asserted) teeth of saints strung round their necks. These ecclesiastically-minded gentlemen were great admirers of the superstition of the Eastern Church, and all had welcomed Limpidus's Russian book as tending to remove the prejudice against such superstition which still existed in the minds of Englishmen. They made him realise what he had hardly realised till then: that he was destined for a great religious work.

'There is something in it,' he said gravely to Carillion, who scoffed at these ideas as hyper-clerical. 'It's time the Christian nations gave up quarrelling. I'm not what you would call religious, but, damn it, I'm a Churchman and I have my principles.'

'Stick to them!' laughed Carillion. 'They will never

bring you to the stake. They only help to make you what you are, a perfect Englishman.'

'I'm not ashamed to be an Englishman, if you are !' Limpidus retorted hotly. 'You ought to be a bit more careful what you say. I know you're cleverer than any of us; but who would ever think it, when you talk such rot. You stand in your own light !'

'Alas, I know it !'

Carillion was the first of the new members who found courage to get up and make a speech. It was undoubtedly a brilliant effort; but the party leader, who met Limpidus in the lobby afterwards, observed : 'Now that is just the kind of speech you must not make. A witty speech—I never heard a wittier—and only an uncommon genius could have made it. But making fun of the House. The House won't stand it. For all the fellow's cleverness, I'm glad he's on the other side. I wish them joy of him. Young Carillion may be an amazing genius like his grandfather, but the House does not want genius. It dislikes it. The English as a race distrust it; and it is untrustworthy. What we want in a young man is painstaking attention and, above all, some degree of modesty, some measure of respect for the opinion of the House.'

Limpidus took this advice so much to heart that he considered it his duty to pass it on to George Carillion, who, when he heard it, only shrugged his shoulders, saying :—

'Don't worry about me. I'm nothing but a bird of passage.'

There was an etiquette for members of the House, which every public schoolboy understood, but which distressed new-comers from uncharted regions of society,

who were for ever falling foul of it. New members were expected to behave themselves, and show a certain measure of respect for the old stagers. They might romp and joke among themselves outside the chamber, but on no account must they make free with an old member unless he expressly invited the familiarity, nor must they resent the tricks which older members might think fit to play on them. Those who 'ragged'—*i.e.* who played and admitted practical jokes—were popular, while those who did not were regarded as curmudgeons. Only when a member had attained to the front benches could he behave exactly as he liked without incurring censure or unpopularity. The immunity of Ministers in this respect was shown by their lying flat on their backs, with hands stuck in their trouser pockets, and feet upon the table, thus advertising a supreme contempt for Parliament, the English people, and the world at large.

The wretched Labour members did not understand all this. They came up full of things they had to say upon behalf of their constituents, regarding themselves as representatives with a right to be heard equal to that of any other representative. They did not see the institution as it really was—the well-kept playground of an ancient game with rules and customs and a hierarchy. They took the claptrap of the hustings seriously, and supposed the Parliament of Great Britain and Ireland to be no more than a hall of free discussion where every member ought to speak his mind. It was comical to watch the process of their disillusion, and good fun to help it on by setting traps for them.

CHAPTER XXV

THE house in Berkeley Square was now the home of Limpidus, and Lady Gwendolen had altered the time-honoured arrangement of its furniture and rooms so greatly that Sir Rusticus declared he could no longer find his way about there, and Miss Rose Fitz-Bear, when she beheld the changes, was quite distressed, though she preserved decorum. The house in Kent was also placed at the disposal of the young folk, who were welcome, too, at Clearfount Abbey at all seasons, but they went there seldom from a reluctance to disturb their children whose abode it was. In London, Limpidus worked hard each morning with his secretary, making the latter coach him in all kinds of subjects, to the end that he might follow their discussion in the House, and talk about them in the lobby, with intelligence. He learned in this way a large number of new catchwords which made his conversation among members weighty and impressive. But he himself remained unchanged, and unimpressed. It was with joy that he escaped into the country, and got some shooting, or rode to hounds, according to the weather and his inclination, or ran down to some race-meeting with a group of friends, or chased a pretty woman, or went to one of Elderberry's naughty parties on the sly. These things constituted life. And the best thing he could have said for Parliament at that time was that its dullness gave a man new zest for life.

The House itself, besides, was not bad fun, at times, and if you took things in the proper spirit. Fellows who took them seriously wore themselves to death, and made themselves disliked into the bargain. He used it as a place of meeting with his friends, and, while at all times conscious of the dignity of his position, did not attach too much importance to the ignorant and wild demands which came to him sometimes from his constituency. Galloway received instructions to compose a sympathetic letter in reply, assuring them of his untiring efforts on behalf of Denderby; Limpidus signed that letter and the incident was at an end.

In the summer following the general election, Sir Rusticus came often to the house in Berkeley Square, seeking advice and comfort from his son, for he was greatly worried. The illness of his wife, which had gone on for years in quite a graceful, undisturbing manner till all the family had grown accustomed to it, had suddenly assumed a more distressing form; and an unruly spirit, shown in frequent trespasses upon his park and coverts, was observable among the rising generation in his villages. But the principal and most immediate cause of his anxiety was Agatha.

Agatha had long been living apart from her husband, but without a formal breach of their relationship. She had been 'as skittish as they make 'em' (said Sir Rusticus), but without favouring any one man more than another of her circle of admirers; but now she was actually living with George Candelly, the racing man, and had actually written to inform her husband of that fact.

'It breaks my heart to say it of a daughter of mine and your dear mother's,' said Sir Rusticus, 'but that unhappy girl has no more morals than a cat. I've seen her, talked religion to her, scolded, coaxed her. But it's all no use. She glories in her shame. She is as bold as brass. She talks quite plainly about things no decent girl would dream of mentioning—least of all to her own father. She talks of men as you or I would talk of women—it's disgusting. God help me, I believe she'd take a well-built footman. There's Eustace Smith—a hulking, handsome fellow; I never liked him; but he's her husband, and she chose him for herself; she would have him, and he is at least a gentleman. I've no doubt he'd given grounds enough for a divorce—the sort of chap who would—and he drinks like a fish, and he was cruel to her. But still he is a gentleman as I said before, and when she wanted to divorce him six months after they were married, I dissuaded her. I hadn't found her out then. Thought she was all right. But since then she's been carrying on with half the men in London. I overhear a word occasionally at the club, not meant for me. And now she's picked up with this rogue Candelly, who is not a gentleman, and positively asks her wretched husband to divorce her. The queer thing is she seems to thrive on it. I never saw her looking better. She doesn't care a hang for anybody.'

Limpidus, to please his father, had an interview with Agatha, and did his utmost to reclaim her, adopting an affectionate but injured tone. She laughed at him and, worse than that, accused him of hypocrisy, of being every bit as bad as she was, only much less honest. Horrified at such irreverence, he washed his hands of her, and

threatened never to set eyes on her again. She laughed more merrily, and told him not to be a fool. As if she cared ! The worst of it was that, when he told his wife of Agatha's impertinence, counting on her support, she also laughed. After all, Agatha's morals were Agatha's affair. His notions were too bourgeois to appeal to her. He had talked to his sister as one talks to servants and the sort of people of whom perfect conduct is expected, not to the sort of people who do what they like.

'You shouldn't talk like that,' cried Limpidus, intensely irritated by an opposition which he knew that he was powerless to overcome. Gwendolen seemed to think he should deceive his father and privately condone his sister's guilt. She herself deceived the poor old boy abominably, pretending to be deeply sympathetic when she heard his tales of woe, and proclaiming him a bore behind his back. The truth was that Sir Rusticus was getting old, and his conversation was becoming mournful and a little tedious. Limpidus himself at times grew weary of it, yet did his best to raise his father's spirits by taking him to dinner at the House and at his various clubs. And he was more indignant than his father over Agatha's affair, because he felt that public scandal, which was imminent, would touch his reputation as a public man.

A piece of news which rather frightened the new member gave boundless satisfaction to Sir Rusticus. The leader of his party in the House gave word to Limpidus that the debate upon the Navy Estimates would be a good occasion for his maiden speech, which ought to be upon his special subject, Russia, in relation to Great Britain's foreign policy. The Government would welcome such a speech from such a good authority, and the House

would hear with interest the views upon that subject expressed by one so well informed as his young friend.

'I'll be there to hear it, my dear boy,' exclaimed Sir Rusticus with warm enthusiasm. 'Gwen will be there, of course, and I must let my old friend Briggs and other people know. I wouldn't miss it for the world. It's an event in history.'

CHAPTER XXVI

A LONG room built out at the back of the house in Berkeley Square, on the ground-floor, had become the study of the member of Parliament. There Limpidus spent an hour or so each morning, and Galloway spent nearly all the hours of daylight. A woman typist was employed three days a week to deal with the great mass of correspondence. The shelves which lined one wall were full of works of reference. The secretary's desk, the typist's table, and the floor adjacent to them, were generally strewn with papers, pamphlets, letters, telegrams. Books and newspapers were on a table in the middle of the room. Only the handsome bureau (with a comfortable chair) reserved for Limpidus, was kept undefiled, its polished surface broken only by a rectangle of white blotting-paper, a pen-tray, letter-weight, and silver ink-stand.

On a sunny morning, when the venetian blinds were drawn down to screen the workers from disturbing rays, and also to protect the Turkey carpet, Limpidus went into this sanctum after breakfast, smoking a cigar.

'I'm awfully busy to-day,' he remarked to Galloway. 'I can't stop more than a few minutes. But I wanted just to say a word to you about my speech. I want it to be epoch-making and all that. It's about Russia, patriotic and the rest of it. You know my views.'

'Wouldn't it be better,' Galloway suggested, 'if you wrote down what you wish?'

'Perhaps it would.'

Limpidus sat down at his bureau, opened a drawer, and took therefrom a sheet of note-paper, dipped pen in ink and wrote :—

MY SPEECH.

Contents.

General situation (brief).

Balance of power in Mediterranean (brief).

Russia now progressive. (Give statistics.) Desirous of understanding with us. (Quote evidence.) Desirability of understanding from our point of view.

Conclusion. Peace. Reduced armaments. Prosperity of Empire.

It took him ten minutes and three sheets of note-paper to work that out. Then he leaned back in his chair and read it over. Thinking the words 'desirous of' too strong, he crossed them out and wrote above them, 'not averse to.' Then, swinging round his chair, he turned to Galloway and handed him the paper.

'There, that's roughly it.'

Galloway read it over.

'The statistics?' he inquired.

'Oh, Blue Book.'

'And the evidence that Russia is not averse to an understanding? Is it in speeches, or in acts, or what?'

Limpidus frowned in thought a moment, then exclaimed :—

'Upon my word, I can't remember at this moment. But it's in my book. I'm in a hurry this morning. Do you want my help in anything?'

'There are a number of letters which require your signature. Miss Bowles, are all those letters ready?'

'I've not quite finished, Mr Galloway.'

'Well, let me sign those that are ready,' said Limpidus. 'I can't wait.'

As if to confirm his statement, Lady Gwendolen sailed in, exclaiming carelessly :—

Limpidus, Jack Pipp has come for you. He's in the breakfast-room. He says you promised to be out with him by ten o'clock. It's now eleven. You won't be in to luncheon, will you? Aggie's coming.'

'The last person I desire to see,' said Limpidus, with some asperity. 'You know my feelings, and you might have left her out at present.'

'She's absolutely priceless,' was the cool reply. 'But you—of course you please yourself.'

She sat upon a corner of her husband's desk and talked across the intervening space to Galloway about some project of amusement which they had in common. Limpidus rushed out to join Jack Pipp, with whom he was soon striding, in high feather, down Piccadilly on his way to Tattersall's.

Three mornings later, when he went into his study, Galloway handed him some typewritten pages with the question :—

'How will that do?'

The secretary had paid ten guineas to a journalistic authority on Russian questions, who had paid a guinea to a real authority, for the statistics and ideas which formed the subject-matter of those pages. He mentioned the ten guineas to his chief, who murmured : 'That's all right,' already deep in the perusal of the document.

'Yes, that's the sort of thing. But it's not exactly what I want. It needs a lot of touching up. This might have been written by a chap who'd got his knowledge out of books. I've been there. We have got to bring that out.'

'Personal anecdote would be out of place, I think,' said Galloway.

'Hang personal anecdote!' retorted Limpidus. 'But it wants something.'

'You mean it wants some touch of local colour?'

'Something of the kind.'

'Well, suppose we introduce some words like moujik and vodka? You can give them the correct pronunciation.'

'No I can't,' said Limpidus. 'I never learnt a word of their accursed jargon. And I never heard a decent Russian speak a word of it except to servants. And don't, for God's sake, put in vodka. It would rouse the temperance cranks.'

'Well, what is it exactly that is wrong with the speech as it now stands?' inquired Galloway with gentle patience.

'Any one might have written it.'

'You mean it's too impersonal?'

'Yes, and too damned dull. It's not my style a bit. Look up my book; you'll see the sort of thing.'

'I'll see what I can do to it,' said Galloway.

He set to work upon the manuscript at once, and submitted the result to Limpidus that evening.

'That's more like it,' was the member's verdict. 'There's some go in this.'

And Limpidus began to talk about it to his friends. He even held a consultation with some representatives

of the ecclesiastical enthusiasts already mentioned, who suggested one or two additions which were subsequently made. Already, previous to that consultation, he had begun committing the discourse to memory upon a system which had been devised for him by Galloway.

'You might hear my speech,' he would say to his secretary at odd moments. 'I think I know it down to "future generations." Don't prompt me till I get to that.'

And Galloway would hear him, noticing the points where he habitually hesitated, as those to be suggested in the final notes—written on half a sheet of letter paper—which he would prepare for the Honourable Member to hold concealed in his hand while actually speaking.

On the day preceding that on which the speech would be delivered, George Carillion—who had been absent from his place in the House for several weeks—appeared suddenly at the luncheon-table of his cousin, Lady Gwendolen. His lean, eager face was as brown as a walnut. He had been in North Africa, enjoying the existence of a savage with the desert tribes. He made Gwen tell him all about the latest books, the latest pictures, and the latest plays, as enthusiastic for civilisation as for savagery.

'Limpidus makes his maiden speech to-morrow,' Gwen informed him. He replied: 'That's splendid. I'll be in my seat.'

'It's nothing very great,' said Limpidus demurely. 'I shall be glad of your opinion of it, if it wouldn't bore you.'

'Carillion is no bad judge,' said Galloway. 'I hope to be allowed to hear his verdict. We all think it a good speech.'

'I'm sure it's good enough,' said Lady Gwendolen.

Accordingly, while they were smoking after luncheon, Limpidus rehearsed his speech, and George, when he had heard it, suggested some improvements in the way of wit, which seemed to Limpidus so obvious that he wondered why he had not thought of them himself.

'You see, it's all just declamation. There's no sting in it. You don't hit out at all. You see my meaning?' said Carillion, and he proceeded to suggest some telling hits.

At the end of an hour the speech was quite transfigured merely by the alteration of a few words here and there, which Limpidus could easily remember.

'I'm eternally grateful to you, George, old man,' he said, shaking his friend's hand.

'You're very welcome,' said Carillion. 'We want a statesman in the family, and since you married Gwendolen, you're one of us, although a beastly Radical.'

Galloway expressed a doubt whether the speech, as altered by Carillion, was altogether suited to the personality of Limpidus. 'We have to think of that, you know,' he murmured.

'You always were a fraud, Tom,' laughed Carillion.

Limpidus started for the House that afternoon, delighted with the changes in his speech. He had the MS. in his pocket, to refresh his memory. Carillion had added just the touches necessary to lift it up above the run of public utterances. But as he strolled across St James's Park, a doubt occurred to him, born of Galloway's queer objection which he there remembered. Was it not, in its embellished form, perhaps, too good? Were not its opinions, perhaps, too decided? Might it not conceivably offend some one? The doubt increased when, having reached the House, he sat and listened to a

lot of speakers, the aim of all of whom appeared to be at all costs to avoid the risk of a decided utterance. There was one man whom his speech, as it now stood, might possibly annoy—a great man on the other side who had been always civil to him. During an interval, he went to see that great one in his room, and laid the speech before him, saying that he thought it only fair to let him know of it beforehand.

‘Of course, I’ll tone it down a bit if you consider it too strong,’ he murmured, as the great man cast his eye over the document.

‘Too strong—not a bit. It’s an excellent little speech,’ came the benevolent reply. ‘I’m only sorry, I’m afraid I shan’t be there to hear it. Of course, I think here’—he pointed to one of Carillion’s interpolations—‘I should leave out that remark if I were you. I’d leave out all these words you’ve added afterwards. They’re merely flourishes, in no way to the point. You don’t mind my making these suggestions, do you? Well, then——’ He picked up a blue pencil and crossed out the interpolations, one by one, as he continued: ‘I think you’ll find it all the better for a little pruning. You’ll please yourself, of course, I merely offer a suggestion, as an old hand to a young member. A really excellent speech. Thank you for showing it to me.’

With a most charming smile the great man handed back the speech to Limpidus, bereft of all the beauties which Carillion had added to it.

Limpidus met George that evening and confessed to him.

‘I hope you won’t mind, old man; I showed my speech to Carter, and he asked me to cut out the things which you put in.’

'Carter? Why, he's the very man whom you're attacking! I'm on his side, a member of his party, but I'll be hanged if I'd submit a speech to him in draft beforehand.'

'It's no good offending anybody needlessly. I'm a new man, you know.'

'Well, you'll get on! No doubt of that!' replied Carillion, laughing, though Limpidus could not perceive the slightest cause for mirth. It was for him a very serious matter. He wished his maiden speech to be approved of by everybody.

The great event fell short of his anticipation. He stood up in a house of, perhaps, forty members, and addressed the Deputy Speaker. The speech took just ten minutes by the clock. There was constant applause from a small group of men below him, who turned round in their seats to face him, one of them playing with a small gold crucifix upon his watch-chain, of which the flashing was distracting to a speaker who always had some difficulty to recall his words; and from Carillion, a lonely figure on the other side. He got through the ordeal with no worse fault than natural hesitation, and it was only after he sat down again, with the relief of trials passed, that he realised that he had left out two whole paragraphs.

The papers all spoke favourably of his speech next morning, and those who had not heard it—the majority of members—offered him sincere congratulations.

On the same day that his maiden effort was applauded in the newspapers, a portrait of his sister Agatha appeared in some of them as respondent in a farcical divorce case which convulsed the town. It struck him as exceedingly hard lines.

CHAPTER XXVII

AGATHA had developed a surprising beauty of the boldest kind, and with it a surprising lack of conscience. From having been the mistress of great houses and held her own triumphantly in sporting circles not renowned for delicacy, she had lost whatever reverence she ever had for the opinion of her relatives, without acquiring any for the ordinances of society. One good quality she did possess: she was straightforward—as honest as a man in money matters and all claims of friendship. But this, to Limpidus, appeared the worst part of her character, since at the same time she was selfish as a man in the pursuit of pleasure and fickle as a man in her amours. She held herself superior to law and custom, her own will necessity, just as would a man of her own class in life. She had been downright rude to Limpidus when he had spoken to her for her good; had told him that she did not care a rap for his opinion; and had called him hypocrite. And he had vowed that he would never speak to her again.

She was divorced with horrible publicity. Her name was publicly associated with the name of George Candelly, a man of evil reputation who was, however, quite prepared to marry her. Yet within a week of the divorce she quarrelled with Candelly for the sake of a good-looking fool, one Ronald Vay, who could not marry her because he had a wife already. With her accustomed candour, Agatha wrote and told her father all about it:

Candelly was a horrid beast, Vay was an angel. Her intention was to go and live abroad with Vay.

Sir Rusticus was quite distraught by this intelligence. He felt himself unequal to the strain of interviewing the unlucky girl, and therefore came to Limpidus for help. It was of great importance, from Agatha's own standpoint, that there should be no fresh scandal in the legal interval which must elapse before the decree nisi was made absolute. Sir Rusticus besought his son to place that point before her in the strongest light. And Limpidus, though very loath, agreed to do so.

After a long and stormy scene, he did succeed in making Agatha admit the need of caution and perceive the inconveniences which would accrue to her if the divorce fell through. The interview took place in a hotel bedroom, and, to Limpidus's horror, it came out that Ronald Vay was staying at the same hotel. Was she insane, he asked, to run such danger, or did she really wish to be kept tied to Eustace? In the end he made her promise to leave the hotel, and go and stay with friends for the remainder of the legal period.

Sir Rusticus, when his son came back to him after that interview, wanted to know how Agatha was looking. Limpidus had not considered how she looked.

There were money matters, too, which had to be explained to her, necessitating yet another interview. In accordance with her promise she had moved from the hotel. From her lawyers, Limpidus obtained her new address—a flat in Chelsea where, they told him, she was staying with a Mrs Marden, her great friend. Limpidus, as he approached the flat, met Mrs Marden coming out. It was a cold day and the lady was wrapped up in furs

which gave a look of radiant comfort to a pretty face and charming figure. He met the challenge of a pair of roguish eyes, and felt exhilarated. Still warm from this encounter, he approached his sister amiably, and asked at once about her friend, this Mrs Marden.

'You know her very well,' said Agatha. 'She was Miss Paul, my governess. She married a man named Marden in the cavalry, the elder brother of some children she was governessing. He died last year and left her comfortably off.'

'I didn't recognise her or I should have stopped and spoken,' murmured Limpidus.

'She told me how you used to kiss her in the summer-house.'

Limpidus was in no prudish mood. He laughed.

'Used to kiss her!' he protested. 'I like that! I tried it once and got an awful wiggling.'

'She didn't mind a bit, really. But she had to be careful in those days. It would have been so easy for her to have come a cropper. She says you put her in her place all right, and told her you could never think of marrying a girl like her.'

'No more I could, you know,' said Limpidus.

'How very honest! Now, about this business, I should like to have a talk with Eustace before settling anything. He understands investments and is conscientious when he gives advice. He gave me a tremendous scolding when he saw me yesterday for running into debt.'

'God bless my soul!' cried Limpidus, half-stupefied. 'Your husband?—Yesterday?—But—you're divorced!'

'Yes; but we're not at daggers drawn. We like each other, and we're partners in a lot of little ventures which amuse us both. There was only one thing that we

differed over. We both needed change; and now we've settled that, we're real good friends.'

'Good Lord !' was all that Limpidus could find to say.

It was useless to attempt to show Agatha the gross indecency, as well as illegality, of being 'real good friends' with her ex-husband at the very time of her divorce. His thoughts returned to the attractive Mrs Marden, and he spoke once more of those old days at Clearfount. At his sister's cordial invitation, he remained to luncheon, for the pleasure of again conversing with so old a friend.

Miss Paul, the slim young governess at Clearfount, had possessed a timid elegance, a fawn-like charm. In Mrs Marden that jejune appeal had blossomed into round and ripe seductiveness. She had known a meagre childhood and a servile youth. And now, at thirty-four, in the full glow of her attraction, she found herself a widow fairly well endowed, with hold upon the fringe of good society. She wished to taste the sweets of life monopolised by that society, to manœuvre for herself some kind of a position where she could enjoy them without fear or cringing or undue publicity. For that reason she was cultivating the goodwill of former pupils, serving them to the best of her capacity in all those confidential matters which require a go-between; for that reason, too, she welcomed the discreet acquaintance of men of solid property and station, men safely married, past the stage of youthful folly, who were willing to accept her friendship on her terms. And such was Limpidus.

CHAPTER XXVIII

WITHIN three years of his election, Limpidus was recognised as a success in Parliament. The forms of speech required in that assembly had become habitual to him, and among the rank and file he passed as an authority on questions of procedure. The leaders had their eye upon him, it was known.

He had been nearly four years a member when his mother died. For as long as he could remember she had been an invalid, apart from life; and he had seen so little of her of late years that his grief at her demise was purely dutiful. He went down to support his father at the funeral, stood bare-headed in a cutting wind which bowed the evergreens in the churchyard, and swayed the leafless elms, and afterwards listened to the old man's flow of mournful reminiscence. Within a month the old man too was in his grave. The politics were thrown into the background for some months. Limpidus was obliged to spend a great deal of his time at Clearfount, and pay some visits to the Kentish and Scottish properties. His natural grief was great. He and his father had possessed so much in common. There were so many things which he could say to no one else, things that would 'interest the governor' (as he used to say), and now there was no one left who knew or cared about them—excepting, perhaps, Agatha, whose honest sorrow at their father's death had much appeased him. He consented to a formal reconciliation with her. Cured of

her infatuation for young Ronald Vay, she was now serenely married to an aged rake, Sir Rufus Bulliter, who let her have entirely her own way.

When at length he was able to return to the routine of life—after a fortnight's recreation on the Scottish moors with certain of the Liberal leaders for his guests, and several ladies, among whom was Mrs Marden—he was conscious that his personal importance had increased enormously. The favour of the party chiefs for him had turned to friendship. He was no longer a young man of merely future promise. Thanks to his diplomatic training and his Russian friendships, he was even sent abroad upon State errands of an unofficial kind. He took a famous villa on the Riviera, where Gwendolen could escape the worst part of English winters, and he himself would go when he could spare the time. He was familiar at the foreign embassies, and in the House acquired the reputation of a cosmopolitan.

It was on an unofficial visit to a Balkan capital, assisted by a Foreign Office expert and two secretaries, that the finishing touch was put to his political education. There was trouble in the capital in question which it was feared might lead to European complications. Limpidus, enjoying himself thoroughly in pleasant company, did not attach too much importance to disturbing rumours. One afternoon he rode out with the representative of a great Power to a place some ten miles from the city where, seated at a table in a rustic wine-shop, in view of admirable mountain scenery, they drank a glass or two of wine and talked things over. His companion declared that the position in the principality was very serious, the head and front of all the trouble being Atsoff, the prime minister, a frantic nationalist.

That one man was the obstacle to any settlement. If only he could be eliminated it would be a blessing.

Limpidus agreed to all his friend's remarks, being at ease and in an amiable mood. He was profoundly horrified at ten o'clock next morning to hear that Atsoff had just been assassinated in the public park which he traversed every morning on his way to the Ministry of the Interior, and that public rumour said that it was his friend's work. The newspaper reports which came out later, denounced his friend, the foreign emissary, as the instigator of the crime. Some of them gave a list of similar assassinations due to him in various countries. The conscience of Sir Limpidus was much disturbed; but Martin Delamere, his colleague, merely shrugged his shoulders and exclaimed :—

'Well, anyhow, that saves us all a lot of trouble!'

'But isn't it going a bit far?' gasped Sir Limpidus.

'It isn't our affair, you know,' said Delamere, engaged in paring his pellucid finger-nails; 'and I believe it is considered not unusual in these latitudes. One must always make allowance for the customs of the country. It's no use grumbling at the thing that's always done. And, really, I think we may say that this event, no doubt unfortunate, has crowned our little mission with complete success.'

Sir Limpidus still demurred at downright murder. But Delamere assured him that, in his opinion, it was much more merciful as it was certainly more expeditious than any other method of removing people who are in the way. It was a recognised method of Eastern diplomacy; and it was what made that diplomacy so wonderfully effective.

'There's quite a lot that we could learn from them;

they stand no nonsense. When I remember the tremendous interests involved in every venture of high politics, I see the opposition of an individual as an act of diabolical rebellion or of sacrifice. He stands before the car of Juggernaut. He asks for death.'

'Oh, if you're sure it's always done!' Sir Limpidus suspired with great relief, for he had no desire to quarrel with a decent fellow like that foreign envoy. 'I was afraid that I might have to mention it in my report.'

'You would have made a bad *faux pas*, if I may say so, murmured Delamere. 'To bring a doubtful and unnecessary charge against a friendly power would ill become you. I say "unnecessary" for our chiefs are not all fools. Why mar the brightness of a perfectly successful—and I must say, for my part, most delightful—little mission by mentioning a detail every one can guess?'

By dint of such assurance Sir Limpidus regained his spirits, and even felt ashamed of his distaste for murder as a weakness unbecoming one whose business was high politics. The interests which men in his position had to guard were so immense that individual life possessed no value as compared with them. Delamere, a highly intellectual man, was full of these ideas, and they seemed good to Limpidus.

It was on his return to London from that mission, which added to his reputation as a coming man, that Limpidus received advice which much annoyed him. Three men, whom he knew well, all in one afternoon, severally and without collusion, took him aside and spoke about his wife's affection for poor Galloway.

'Oh, rot!' exclaimed Sir Limpidus. 'I know all about that. There's absolutely nothing in it, I assure you.'

'I dare say not, but everybody thinks there is.'

It was all bosh, of course. Gwendolen and Galloway had been good friends for years. They gabbled books and art and music and theology—topics which to Sir Limpidus appeared both tiresome and unpractical. Once, even, to his horror, he had heard them talking Socialism in an earnest tone, as if there might be something in it after all. Galloway was a clever fellow, quite presentable; but he wore spectacles, he had the student's stoop; he was deficient in self-confidence, had not the conquering air which women like. No girl of Gwendolen's upbringing would prefer him to a proper man accustomed to command, whose frame had been developed by field-sports.

No, Galloway was her pet attendant, nothing more. He had no doubt whatever on the subject. But if their going out together had set people talking, it was time to put a stop to it. His ears burned at the thought that any one could ever think him a complaisant husband. He did not wish to make a fuss or upset anybody. But he would give a friendly hint to Gwendolen.

CHAPTER XXIX

It was after one o'clock in the morning when Limpidus came back from the House. A sleepy footman, on night duty, stood up to receive him.

'Has her ladyship come in yet?' Limpidus inquired. She had been in about three-quarters of an hour, he was informed.

He went upstairs and knocked at the door of her dressing-room. She cried: 'Come in!' and in he went.

Gwendolen was in the hands of her maid, sitting before a mirror with a book in her lap, her long hair falling round her in a shower.

'Sit down and wait a minute, do you mind?' she said. 'Marie will soon have done.'

Marie did not hasten her proceedings in the least. She was mistress of her business, and feared nobody. Limpidus had time to think over his errand and rehearse the form of words he had prepared to fit it.

'Well, what is it?' questioned Gwendolen at length.

'I've come to ask you to do something to oblige me, Gwen,' he said. 'It's not upon my own account at all. I have not the least objection to your doing just as you please, I know quite well that I can trust you. It is the effect on other people that I think about. People in our position have to think about it for the sake of keeping up appearances, for the sake of the country.'

'How truly thrilling!' Gwendolen exclaimed. 'Do tell me what it is.'

But Limpidus was not going to cut short the preface which he had so carefully prepared upon the model of those mild reproofs which he and other members had at times received from Ministers. Such kind appeals to the good feeling of the private member were invariably made on lofty public grounds.

'You must not think that I am angry or offended, or have the slightest wish to interfere in any way. But there are circumstances in which even the most innocent preoccupations and amusements are dangerous, for they may be misconstrued. We have to think of the effect upon the outside world.'

'Oh, Limpidus, do hurry up!' cried Lady Gwendolen. 'I'm simply dying to know what it is.'

Her joyous interest displeased him, and he frowned as he went on: 'Don't think that I personally have the least objection or disapprove at all. But people are such asses. They will make a talk; and other asses listen.'

At this point his wife laid her hand upon his arm and, looking straight into his face, with laughing eyes, entreated:—

'Limpidus dear, for Heaven's sake don't tantalise me any longer. What abominable crime have I committed? And I was thinking nothing ever happened or would ever happen again. And now you come and give me these delicious thrills.'

'It's not a joking matter,' Sir Limpidus exclaimed, his frown increasing, 'because of the effect on other people. I wish you'd see a little less of poor old Galloway.'

'Oh, is that all?' She picked up a hand-mirror from the dressing-table and studied her appearance in it carelessly. 'Well, we'll talk about it, if you wish. You want me to see less of Mr Galloway. I don't know why you

call him "poor old Galloway." He isn't a pauper and he isn't senile, and he's quite the most intelligent, delightful man I know. I don't know how I am to see less of him when he lives in the same house and is very much more often to be found than you are.'

'Of course I don't mind how much you see of one another in the house. It is your going out with him to theatres and public places and other people's houses that makes people talk.'

'What do they say about us? Tell me! It is so exciting!'

'Now don't be silly,' said Sir Limpidus, uneasily aware that the whole argument was going wrong, but unprovided with the formula required to put it right. 'I'm speaking for your sake. It doesn't look well for my wife to be always about with my secretary.'

'You strike me, dear, as just a little bit unfair. How many times, when there has been some function on, have you proclaimed yourself too busy to escort me, and passed me on to Mr Galloway—your friend, I understood, before he was your secretary.'

'Oh, that's all right, but things can go too far.'

He waited for her answer. After a long pause she said as if in meditation:—

'I am really fond of Mr Galloway.'

'Oh, so am I, if it comes to that. We all are. He's a good chap. I only want you to be a bit careful.'

She laid aside the mirror and smiled sweetly on him.

'Limpidus, you really are a perfect angel,' she exclaimed. 'Very few husbands would be half so generous. You'd really rather that I went all lengths with Mr Galloway so long as people didn't know about it, than

that I should have an open friendship with him of which people talked.'

'That is not what I said.'

'But you mean that.'

'Keep to the point, please! You are trying to evade the question.'

'My dearest Limpidus, I'm not your honourable friend on the other side. Please don't declaim at me. You said in so many words that you did not wish to interfere with my friendship for Mr Galloway except in so far as it is open and above-board. I'm sure you would not be so cruel as to deny me private consolation such as you yourself derive from Mrs Marden and so many others.'

'Now, really, Gwendolen!'

'Don't lose your temper, sweet. I'm talking to you calmly, in the friendliest way. You said you wished to have a friendly talk with me. If I would only keep my guilty passions quite demure and surreptitious—as you keep yours, my love!—you would not mind a bit. But an innocent and open friendship you object to, because people talk.'

'I have told you once already that I don't object to it at all, myself! It's only other people that I'm thinking of. And I don't know why you drag in Mrs Marden—a girl I've known for years. She was my sister's governess, and like one of the family. And now she's alone in the world I look after her a bit.'

'A man I've known for years. He is my husband's secretary, and he is like one of the family. When I'm alone he looks after me a bit,' Gwendolen chanted as a mocking echo.

'It's altogether different.'

'There are differences, I admit. You need somebody to give you secret comfort and refreshment--some nymph in an ambrosial grot to which you can withdraw occasionally from the battle——'

'What utter rot! It's like some silly novel.'

'And I need somebody to be my escort out of doors, to share my burden of dull social functions, and enliven them by his remarks and small attentions.'

'I go with you, you know, to lots of functions.'

'You do, my sweet one, but you're not amusing. You are always bored. You don't attend on me a bit. You know you couldn't if you tried; you're too self-centred.'

'I don't see any point in what you're saying.'

'The point is this: I don't object to Mrs Marden or anybody else who gives you secret comfort. I've asked her here to please you, many times. She is a perfect cat, but she is quite good company.. If anything I rather like her. I can say the same of Fifi Porter and Dolores Clare and other women you distinguish by your favour. I ask you in the same way to respect my weakness, which is Mr Galloway.'

'Good Lord!' cried out Sir Limpidus, beside himself. 'What the deuce is all this? I never accused you of anything, and here you are accusing me of things I never dreamt of!'

'To dream is not your nature, dearest love!'

'I won't talk to you any longer. What I say is this: You must not go out so much alone with Galloway.'

'I thought the trouble was that I was not alone with him, that he escorted me to theatres and public places——'

'Not another word! Do what I say, or I shall have to get another secretary.'

'Then, darling, you will have to get another wife if you do that, for I shall certainly go off with Mr Galloway.'

'What!' thundered Limpidus, starting to his feet; and then stood glaring down upon her with so terrified a look that she laughed heartily and asked him:—

'What's the matter? You gave your ultimatum and I've given mine. We each know now what we have to expect. People will talk then with some reason, won't they? But if you spent less time upon your own affairs and more with me, it might stop people talking quite effectually, don't you think?'

'You know how rushed I am with business.'

'Yes, I know, my dear. I know that Mr Galloway does most of it.'

'Oh, does he? I dare say! A lot you know about it. He only does the rough-and-ready part.'

'And you provide artistic touches. Yes, of course, dear.'

Sir Limpidus at last broke out:—

'Confound it all, I don't know what you mean. Making this hellish row about a simple matter, which I had a right to ask.'

'You have no right to ask it.'

'Yes, I have, a perfect right. My name is being bandied about in a way to damage my career. I hear the scandal and I come and ask you, for all our sakes, to put a stop to it. You fool me like a—actress. You as good as tell me——'

Lady Gwendolen lifted her hand half peremptorily, half appealingly, saying:—

'Hush, dear! You're getting heated and quite incoherent. I much preferred your former parliamentary manner, which made me feel like the leader of the

Opposition or the Speaker or somebody. I think, if you'll allow me, I should like to go to bed. You've been declaiming at me for an hour and I am none the wiser. I expect you'll feel much better in the morning, dear.'

Limpidus swore, then turned upon his heel and went.

'Good-night, my love! Sleep well!' said Lady Gwendolen.

CHAPTER XXX

AFTER a night's reflection, Sir Limpidus allowed things to continue as they were before. The attitude assumed by Gwendolen convinced him that that which he had thought impossible had really happened. So long as he alone possessed the certainty, it made no difference. Had he been in the position of Dick, Tom, or Harry, he would have made a fuss and risked a public scandal. But a statesman had to sacrifice his private feelings. So he made no further mention of the subject, though it sometimes worried him, and often made him irritable in his talk to Galloway, with whom he now found fault. It was no longer a mere inconvenience, it was a relief, to him when the secretary went to visit his own people—of whom the Fitz-Bearcs had, of course, no knowledge—somewhere in the north.

Sir Limpidus was at his place in Scotland for the grouse; at Clearfount or his Kentish mansion for the other shooting; Homburg and Cannes and Longchamps saw him in their season; and wherever he appeared he was the model of behaviour.

A general election came but it did not disturb him much since no one was so bold as to contest his seat. The whole establishment went down to Clearfount for a month while Sir Limpidus made speeches here and there in the constituency, and issued an address of thanks to the electors. It was a holiday for him, and for the first time he was able to take notice of his children, who were

now conversable. The eldest boy was quite a little man. He had a pony of his own and rode beside Sir Limpidus, who took a sentimental pleasure in regaling him with moral platitudes. One of the girls gave promise of some beauty. He hoped she would not go the way of Agatha. In short, 'the children,' from the fated nuisance they had seemed in infancy, were now become a source of pride to their progenitor; who, when he rode beside his son and heir, was doubly conscious of his duty to the Name, the Country, and the Property.

The result of the elections gratified him on the whole, though he lamented the defeat of decent men upon the other side, and was horrified at the increase in the number of outsiders, which he regarded as a danger to the State. In the old Parliament there had been very few labour men, and those had been regarded with much jovial scorn as freaks of nature. In the new Parliament there were several of those undesirables. Sir Limpidus reviewed them on the opening day, and was disgusted by their look of stupid earnestness in opposition to all sound tradition and good breeding. But word went forth in Limpidus's party that these intruders should be kindly treated. Early in the session they were asked to a reception given by a noble Marchioness; and following that high example, Lady Gwendolen invited one of them to her 'At Home,' where Lady Hydrangea Timms, that rather overblown expansive Venus, pronounced him 'sweet beyond all words,' and fell in love with him. It was most important, everybody felt, that these strange, hairy creatures should know luxury, and thus acquire a liking for the order of society which they attacked in ignorance. And it was wonderful how soon they showed a marked improvement. Only one or two withstood the

gentle treatment—men with the ecstatic look of holy martyrs, making one long to terminate their agony—and their ravings, disapproved by their own comrades, evoked only scornful laughter in the House.

‘That invariably has been the way in England,’ said Carillion, when he returned to parliamentary duty from a tour in Kurdistan, and Sir Limpidus remarked upon this happy change to him. ‘Routine has always triumphed over thought, with the result in intellectual dullness of a solemn roundabout. The very spirit of the race, embodied in our institutions, hates ideas. That’s why we loathed Disraeli—the one man who diagnosed us rightly and tried to save us from the consequence of our sublime pomposity. We hate enthusiasm like the plague; we hate disturbance. And so we’ve made our party system quite conventional, a game with rules which any dullard can acquire, but which no heaven-born genius could endure a single moment. King, Lords, and Commons have, in turn, succumbed to it, and have become mere boundaries of the game. These Labour men will be absorbed by it, as surely as the manufacturers and other hostile elements were absorbed before them. If they knew their business they would keep away from this perennial abode of lotus-eaters. Excuse me, Limpy, if I mix my similes a bit. They’d have kept away from the machine if they were sensible, but now they’re caught in it like everybody else. It’s much too powerful to be controlled or altered by any one less mighty than some thunder-bearing prophet. But what you fellows never see is this: that the machine has absorbed us as completely as it has the rest. Some of us may think we run it, but we don’t a bit. It has absorbed our principles, our life, our honour as a class. In order to preserve it—

or the game, if you prefer that metaphor—we've made concessions to all kinds of people; we've sacrificed to Mammon and embraced the plutocrat. Once we had high ideals—in crystallised, hereditary form as principles or prejudices, if you like—but still ideals. To-day our only gospel is expediency, our God is money. In the struggle to preserve our position we have thrown away our title to respect. We made the machine, and now, powerless to manage, we bow down and worship it.'

'I wish you wouldn't talk such stuff,' said Limpidus indignantly. 'It's all right to me, who know you well. But I'm afraid you'd say the same to any one, even to a workman in your own constituency. Really, Carillion, you're a hopeless case. It may be clever, but it strikes me as a crime, for any man to run down his own class and country. You seem to have a grievance, but I don't know what it is. And, upon my word, I don't believe you know yourself. I can't make head or tail of your ideas, as you choose to call them. It seems to me you just let fly at everything.'

Sir Limpidus was an important member of his party, with the offer of an under-secretaryship in his pocket at that moment, while George Carillion was still nobody, a mere erratic genius, a free lance.

'Well, look at it another way,' said George long-sufferingly. 'You talk about our duty to our country, but our duty as a class is that of owners of the land. We used to do it once upon a time respectably. We farmed, we made experiments in agriculture, we did our utmost to improve the breeds of sheep and cattle. We looked after our tenants more or less paternally, and took care of the poor on our estates. Now that's all gone. The new ideal is profit or display—a merchant's or a

millionaire's ideal, not a gentleman's. We have absorbed the manufacturer and the successful tradesman and the banker. You will say : that is the strength of English aristocracy. I say, rubbish. Look about you, you will see that the money-grubbers have absorbed us and destroyed our aristocracy. We think as they used to think, and act as they used to act. Our grandfathers would be ashamed to own us. We have bourgeois souls. And we're no longer English, racy of the soil. You, Limpy, have much more in common with a Russian bureaucrat than with an English farmer.

'Look at the public schools. They were all right while they were the training-ground of a close aristocracy, and every boy who went there knew his place. But the desire of every snob in the three kingdoms to give his son exactly the same schooling as my lord, has turned it from plain schooling to a kind of social mark, and made a fetish of a pretty rotten system, with the result that new public schools exactly like our own are springing up all round us, turning out men remarkably like you and me, who have no place as yet in the community. They can only get a place by cringing, by complete submission. And what becomes of British independence?'

'How you do exaggerate !' cried Limpidus, amused.

'All are willing and enthusiastic slaves of the social and political machine which drags them on, becoming harder upon those outside it every year.'

'Speak for your Tories,' answered Limpidus derisively. 'Our whole thought is for the welfare of the people. Look at our present programme, for example.'

'Wonderful !' suspired Carillion, gazing upon his friend with awe-struck eyes. 'I ask for bread, you offer me your party programme.'

'You always were a — fool, George !' exclaimed Sir Limpidus, past patience. 'I can't stop any longer listening to such rot, I must be off.'

He smote Carillion on the chest and hurried on.

'I'll pay you out for that to-night at dinner !' shouted George.

Limpidus did believe devoutly in his party programme, not as an absolute specific for the country's ailments, but as the best concoction practicable in a world where decent people had the upper hand and meant to keep it. He believed in it still more when he became an Under-Secretary, and saw the merry little wheels of the machine at work. He had a talent for routine, he found, and came to love it, spending hours in his department, where he had a sumptuous room, pleased with the coming in and out of reverent officials, the weight attaching to his signature, the awe surrounding him. But the chief part of his duty was to answer questions in the House. In this he earned the gratitude of the department and his chief's good will. The permanent officials, that high priesthood of routine, were fervent in their praise of his correct assumption of omniscience on their behalf, his bland refusal to concede the slightest information, the stern, reproachful air with which he crushed inquirers. He knew very little of the work of the department, but that did not matter. What the Government wanted was a man who could protect them from too close inquiries. And that he did in an impressive way.

A touch of gracious arrogance appeared in his demeanour towards his underlings—the manner of a man who has approved his right to be considered of superior worth—and even Galloway was made to feel a certain

distance. This aloofness was so perfectly correct in his position, so entirely fitting, that he never dreamt that any one in Galloway's position could resent it. He had played the part of providence to Galloway, and, in spite of periodical misgivings with regard to Gwendolen, believed him grateful. If any one had told him that Tom Galloway would ever fail him, he would have laughed the bare idea to scorn. But he was destined to be disillusioned on the subject of this friend and protégé. He had never met with rank ingratitude before, and it was long before his reason could accept it as a fact.

CHAPTER XXXI

It was one morning in the summer weather, down at Clearfount. Sir Limpidus, having just come in from riding with his boys, was passing the door of the library on his way to his dressing-room, when Galloway appeared with papers in his hand as usual.

'Well, what is it?' he inquired a trifle fretfully.

'May I speak to you a minute?'

Limpidus shrugged and went with him into the library.

'Well, what is it?' he inquired a second time, while looking daggers at the sheaf of papers carried by the secretary.

'I want to give you a month's notice, please.'

If the fine Jacobean ceiling had come crashing down upon his head, Sir Limpidus could not have looked more perfectly aghast than he did then.

'Don't be an ass!' was all that he could find to say.

'I'm quite in earnest,' answered Galloway good-temperedly. 'Of course, I shall be glad to stay a few weeks longer, if necessary, till you have found some one else to fill the post. But I don't suppose you'll have any difficulty in doing that.'

Sir Limpidus did not reply immediately. He brushed a hand across his forehead, and then crossed the room and sat down in a chair before a writing-table. Leaning his elbows on that table, with chin laid in the cup of his joined hands, he spoke at length, inquiring:—

'What's the matter? If it's anything to do with money we can put it right, no doubt.'

'No, believe me, it isn't that at all. You've been extremely generous. But, you see, when I accepted this position, I had no intention of remaining here for life. I regarded it—as you yourself so kindly put it—as the first step of the ladder.'

'Well, so it is. When you feel like retiring I promise you I'll find some comfortable post for you.'

'I'd rather launch out on my own account.'

'In politics? You can't; you haven't got the money.'

'As it happens, I have had some money left me. My idea is not to stand at once for Parliament, but to work in a constituency till I see my way. I have been given reason to hope that part at least of my expenses will be paid for me.'

'By whom?' demanded Limpidus with ire. 'Not by our people! They wouldn't play a dirty trick like that on me. And if you're going to the other side—I don't think much of any man who turns his coat.'

'I never was a Liberal, you know.'

'Of course I know you used to call yourself a Conservative at Cambridge. But I must say I had thought that all these years with me—— But never mind! . . . And you really reckon it an ordinary, not unfriendly act to go over to the enemy after you have been my right hand man, and in possession of my secrets?'

'You need not be afraid that I shall let out any of your secrets,' said the secretary—downright rudely, Limpidus considered. There must be something underneath this sudden change of manner, this strange and disconcerting wish to leave a comfortable post. Abruptly he leaned forward, pleading as he would have pleaded

with a friend who had announced his will to commit suicide.

'Look here, old man,' he said, 'be frank with me. If it is anything I have done or said, forget it. I will mend my ways. I have been so confoundedly worried with State business these last months that I've been irritable, I know. I've found it hard to say a civil word to anybody. And then, if you must have the whole truth, I've felt just a little jealous of your favour with my wife—Of course, I see now there was nothing in it,' Limpidus made haste to add, seeing the secretary's face assume an angry red. 'I've put it clean out of my head. Let's be good friends again.'

'Nothing in it!' exclaimed Galloway with bitterness. 'You say truly. Lady Gwendolen has been extremely kind to me. But I am sure she is incapable of giving me a thought in that way. For that very reason she has shown me "favour," as you put it—the sort of favour she would show an upper servant—not bothering to hide her real feelings and opinions in my presence. I was safe and useful; that is all, I think.'

'No, no, you're wrong, old man! She thinks the world of you, She told me so herself.' said Limpidus with hurried zeal. He rose. 'Well, let us both have half an hour to think it over,' he exclaimed in hearty tones. 'I can't get used to the idea all in a moment.'

'Just as you please. But it will make no difference.'

Sir Limpidus felt sure that some small element of pique or grievance was at the bottom of his secretary's insubordination. A woman would be able to elicit it more easily he thought, and probably a woman was the cause of it. He therefore went in search of Lady Gwendolen. A servant told him she was in the water-

garden. He went along a terrace, down an alley of azaleas between hedges of clipped yew, across two formal gardens perfect of their kind and kept as tidy as reception-rooms, and found his wife reposing on a bank beside a lily-pond where there was shade.

'I say! What's wrong with Galloway?' he asked abruptly.

'Oh, is he ill?' she answered carelessly. 'I didn't know. He has come into some money, so he told me yesterday, perhaps it has turned his brain a little. He seemed different somehow.'

'He's given a month's notice.'

'How absurd of him!'

'I'm very much annoyed,' said Limpidus. 'Just when I'm so busy that I don't know what to do, the fellow talks of going into politics upon his own account. He can't, of course, he hasn't got the means.'

'He has come in for twenty thousand pounds, he told me.'

'Well, what's that? Enough to live on fairly comfortably. He can't make a splash with it. That may be what has turned his head, as you suggest. From what he said, I fancied something had offended him. You haven't quarrelled with him, have you, or found fault with him for anything?'

'Oh, dear, no. I don't think so.'

'Well, I must say his behaviour is peculiar. Down-right caddish. After learning all that I can teach him about politics, and being in my confidence for all these years, he calmly talks of going over to the other side.'

'Does he, indeed? He must be off his head. I see that I must have a talk with him.'

'I wish you would. He's in the library.'

'I do consider that he might have thought of me a little. There aren't so many people in my daily life worth talking to, that I can afford to lose the most intelligent. At any rate, I think he should have told me first.'

'I made quite sure he had,' said Limpidus. 'You go and talk to him. You'll find me here.'

As he watched her stalk off up the alley of acacias, a woman with a grievance, if there ever was one, and a clever woman too, he had no doubt of her subduing Galloway. He lay down on the bank beside the lily-pond, lighted a pipe, and waited for her to return, throwing a stone into the water now and then.

She took him by surprise when she returned at last.

'Well?' he inquired.

She shrugged her shoulders. 'He is off his head. I was as sweet as I could be; I actually tried to coax him; I appealed to his better nature. All no use.' She sat down on the bank beside her husband. 'I never suspected it before, but he is simply eaten up with conceit. He thinks that he is big enough to stand alone—in politics!—just because he happens to be very clever. I'm afraid it's hopeless.'

'Whatever shall we do without him?' faltered Limpidus.

'I can do very well without him, after this experience. If you can't you must talk to him yourself. I've done my utmost, and I'll have nothing more to do with it. But I know what I should do if I were you. Tell him to go at once.'

'Oh, I say!' protested Limpidus. 'I should be in a mess. I must have some one.'

'Telegraph to Roderick. He'll come and help you.'

Roderick was a cousin and a pet of hers.

'No, no, dear, you don't understand. The business is so complicated that it will take him quite a month to put things straight for his successor.'

'Do as you please. I've told you my opinion.'

Sir Limpidus went back to the library, where Galloway was sitting by the table strewn with papers, idly drumming with his fingers. He made one last appeal.

'Look here!' he said. 'Gwendolen tells me that you really wish to enter Parliament. I didn't know you had ambitions in that way, or I could probably have arranged matters for you. I'll try to do so now if you'll stop on a bit. You'll stand an infinitely better chance with us, I think.'

'Thank you very much, but I would rather not. I've always wanted to be independent, and now that I have got the chance I mean to take it.'

'Well, I must say I think it hard that you should spring this mine upon me when I am so busy.'

'I have said that I will study your convenience to the utmost of my powers. You and Lady Gwendolen have been extremely kind; but it was really a business arrangement, and you've had your money's worth.'

'I object to that way of putting it,' said Limpidus. 'It was a friendly arrangement, on my side at least.'

'Thank you for saying that; but I have no illusions. I know that men like me—doomed to be hangers-on for lack of money—have really more in common with the working classes than they have with you. I go further, and I say that any one who produces anything of use to the community— There are men of your sort, George Carillion for instance, who do work—'

'Oh, stop it!' interjected Limpidus, 'Carillion is an utter failure. He's done nothing!'

'Well, that last book of his is really great, to my mind. What I mean is that men like him and Lord de Quester and St Merryn really have more in common with us working people than with you. They have nothing to fear from popular upheavals since they've justified their existence.'

'Don't I justify my existence? I work hard enough—for nothing,' said Sir Limpidus, becoming calmer in proportion as his adversary grew more vehement.

'Well, if you want the honest truth, Fitz-Beare, you don't. You live entirely on the work of other men. In a proper democratic state, I should have been in the position which you now enjoy, and you——'

'Oh, let it rest!' said Limpidus indulgently, and with the cheerful air habitual to all his kind when faced with rank, heretical insanity. 'You've done a lot for me, I know, and I'm extremely grateful to you. I'd no idea that you were such a revolutionary.'

'I'm not a revolutionary. I'm ambitious, so I'm going to join one of the orthodox political parties, though I don't believe in either of them, and regard the difference between them as conventional.'

'Well, then, the matter's settled. And we'll say no more about it. I'm very much obliged for all you've done for me,' agreed Sir Limpidus with infinite politeness, the manner he had learnt to use in conversation with an open enemy.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE relations of the host and hostess with the secretary were from that moment of such high politeness that Sir Limpidus was much relieved when Galloway himself suggested that his presence down at Clearfount was no longer necessary. He would go up to the house in London and work there, and his chief could give him orders through the telephone.

'It strikes me as a good idea,' said Limpidus. 'You would feel more independent. Though, of course, it is a pleasure to us all to have you here.'

It was undoubtedly a pleasure to the children, who raised bitter lamentations when Mr Galloway departed suddenly. But for Sir Limpidus and Lady Gwendolen Fitz-Beare there was no pleasure till he had departed.

'He has turned out altogether different from what I thought him. An arrogant, conceited fellow,' said Sir Limpidus.

'I must say I am disappointed in him,' murmured Lady Gwendolen. 'I used to like him very much indeed.'

'I believed you were in love with him,' Sir Limpidus confessed. 'You once as good as told me you were.'

'Well, if I had been I should not have told you, now do you understand? You never have approached to understanding me. You imagine that I have volcanic passions like poor darling Agatha, when in reality I'm icy cold but just a little curious. Perhaps I was as much in love with Mr Galloway as I ever shall be with any one.'

He really is extremely interesting, and at one time he was very much in love with me. I could not be more annoyed at his desertion of us in this way if I had been in love with him. I had been at pains to make myself agreeable to him, and in return I did expect from him fidelity. I know it sounds unreasonable, but I am feminine.'

'I'm afraid all that's beyond me,' said Sir Limpidus.

He noticed that his wife was looking pale and more severe than usual.

The position of his private secretary was desirable for any man who aimed at a political career. A Cabinet Minister, who was staying in the house, advised him to make capital of the vacancy, both for himself and for the party, by appointing some young man of wealth and family; and when he mentioned the advice to Lady Gwendolen, she quite agreed with it and urged him to appoint her cousin Roderick without delay. And so he did.

But Roderick, though ornamental and quite amiable, was absolutely useless as a substitute for Galloway, unless it might be from the point of view of Lady Gwendolen. Two lady clerks were needed to correct his spelling and deal with all the papers, pamphlets, correspondence which accumulated on the table where he sometimes sat. But they were useless for the most important work, composing speeches and suggesting thoughts.

There came a day when, in the study of the house in Berkeley Square, Sir Limpidus was in despair but dare not show it. The task of making an important statement had been laid on him, and ministers desired him to enshrine it in a telling speech. But he had no ideas upon

the subject. After trying vainly to derive ideas from Roderick, he went upstairs into his dressing-room and rang for Glubber, whom he then consulted in a joking way. Glubber had plenty of ideas, but none of those which he produced were to the point. Limpidus called him a pernicious fool, to which he said, 'Quite so, sir,' and told him to be gone, on which he went.

Then Limpidus had an inspiration. He would send for Galloway. He had the scoundrel's home address, he now remembered. Having written and despatched a telegraphic message in these words: 'Come at once. Important work. Spare no expense,' he waited with impatience for an answer, which arrived at length: 'Sorry engaged.'

Then, after cudgelling his brains for half an hour without result, he felt the need of rest and went to call on Eileen Marden; who, when informed of his dilemma, was much more than merely sympathetic. She sat down, and there and then sketched out a speech, which he was able to improve and translate into Parliamentary language.

Looking in at Fifi Porter's on his way from Eileen to the House, he had the luck to find that fascinating creature quite alone. She was a clever woman. She put some life into the speech which he and Mrs Marden had provided with ideas and shape. She sent the finished product to a typewriting establishment for him, by special messenger, requesting that two copies of it should be made at once; which copies he found waiting for him in the hall at Berkeley Square when he reached home some two hours after midnight. These he looked over and corrected in the morning and showed to his chief that afternoon. His chief made one or two acute

suggestions which Sir Limpidus himself was able to embody in the text.

And then he set himself to learn it off by heart, thinking to use Roderick as he had used his former secretary for that purpose. But Roderick was not so patient, he was frankly bored; and when Sir Limpidus approached him for rehearsal, he was called elsewhere. Limpidus would have liked to have recourse again to Mrs Marden, but he felt it would be wrong to victimise a woman with so dull a task; besides, he did not wish her to receive a false impression of him as quite helpless by himself in all such matters. It was the kind of task which should not be inflicted on any but a paid adherent. And so he had recourse to Glubber, who was highly flattered, and really felt himself to be almost a member of the Government as he helped his master through the long, impressive periods.

The speech was, in due course, delivered, and it won applause, though some said they preferred Sir Limpidus's earlier style. Eileen Marden, when he went to see her after it was over, remarked that he was looking tired out.

'The fact is,' he admitted, 'that I've worked myself to death these last few weeks. Roderick is a good chap, but he's not the slightest use to me—no brains, you know.'

'You ought to have a second secretary, not for show but work,' said Eileen feelingly; and she went on to tell him of a young acquaintance of her own, a very clever man indeed, just down from Oxford, who, being anxious to secure a decent start in life, would not be too particular respecting terms. Sir Limpidus agreed to meet the young man at her flat and, meeting him, was so well

pleased with his appearance and address that he engaged him on the spot at quite a generous salary. Happening to meet Fifi Porter riding in the Row upon the morning after this arrangement had been made, he told her of it in a tonè of self-congratulation.

Fifi, pouting, rolled reproachful eyes at him and moaned :—

‘Oh, I am disappointed ! Why didn’t you tell me that you wanted some one to play up to you ? There’s my own brother Reggie, as clever as they make ‘em, who would give his soul to get a chance as good as that. He’d work for nothing !’

So well did she set forth her brother’s merits, that Limpidus perceived he must have yet another private secretary. When his staff was thus increased, Lady Gwendolen called the large back-room in Berkeley Square ‘the secretariate.’ She welcomed an arrangement which set Roderick free to be her escort and attendant at all times.

And Limpidus had no more trouble with the brain-work which he had to do than was involved in the decision whether Eileen’s protégé or Fifi’s brother was to do it for him. He soon got rid of that dilemma also, finding that they settled it between themselves.

CHAPTER XXXIII

SIR LIMPIDUS had been in London for a fortnight without a break or any relaxation of the strain of work, which happened at the time to be unusually great, owing to the sittings of a Parliamentary Commission in close touch with his department. The demands of that Commission in the public interest, although excessive and of course absurd, were not to be evaded, and they kept him busy in the House and at the office and at home, giving his weight and sanction to the work of underlings. Even on Sundays he had been obliged to keep the secretariate going, and had not been able to put public business altogether from his mind. Now that the unaccustomed strain was over, he felt overworked. Eileen and Fifi both assured him that he needed rest. Going to his club one autumn morning, he happened to encounter George Carillion at the corner of St James's Street and Piccadilly. Carillion observed that he was looking out of sorts.

'I've had a heavy time, you know,' replied Sir Limpidus, passing a hand across his weary eyes. 'I'm feeling a bit fagged. I wish to God that I could get away for, say, six weeks.'

'If I did not know that I was speaking to an Indispensable, a member of the Government,' chuckled Carillion, 'I should suggest that you might pair with me, and come out to Albania. I am starting this day week.'

A splendid country for wild shooting. You only need a suit-case and a gun.'

'By Jove! It's just the change I long for. Never been there. I'll have a try, by Jove! But I fear I'm, as you say, an indispensable.'

'Well, let me know if you can manage it, by hook or crook. I don't know why it is, but I have always had a liking for you, Limpy, and enjoyed your company.'

Limpidus was full of longing to escape from London for a while; the idea of Albania and a wild adventurous existence appealed to him so strongly that, instead of going to his club as he had first intended, he took a cab and went to Welbeck Street to see his doctor, a congenial soul, who said at once that he required a rest and change of scenery. Then he went on to see his chief, the Secretary of State for his department. Assuming a forlorn and listless air, he told the story of his sudden illness; his visit to the doctor, and that doctor's verdict.

'Would it be possible for me to get abroad for a few weeks?'

'All things are possible—for you and me,' replied the minister. 'So far as I know there is nothing in the wind at present. I can do without you for a bit. Young Surbiton can do your duties in the House. You'd better see him. But there's a ritual to be observed, you know. You must have a notice of your illness in the newspapers. Dr Grey should issue bulletins for a few days. Then it can be known that you have gone abroad by medical advice. "A serious deprivation for the Government at such a time. Opinion in the lobby was unanimously of regret for the absence of so popular a member as Sir

Limpidus Fitz-Beare. Members on both sides were fervent in the hope that he would soon return with health completely re-established.' You know the kind of thing.'

'But I want to be off this day week.'

'Well, what of that? The ceremony will be well advanced by then, and there is no reason that I know of why your actual departure need coincide with the official tidings of the same. So long as people know you are not taking a mere holiday. They think us so tremendously important that affairs are sure to suffer from our absence. The fact is, we are not, in ordinary times; but we're supposed to be, and must behave as if we were. Of course if anything important did crop up, necessitating a new train of thought and a decision, it would fall on us. I hope it will not happen in my time. It's a terrifying thought.'

Next morning Limpidus was able to inform Carillion that he would join him in the expedition to Albania. Then he retired into his house and set in motion the slow ritual required by custom, while Glubber by his orders made some needful purchases, inquired about the price of tickets and divulged his illness. The daily bulletins had reached the stage: 'Sir Limpidus Fitz-Beare shows some improvement, having spent a restful night,' when he set off incognito, with Glubber in attendance, having said a fond farewell to wife and children and his private friends.

The journey to Brindisi was uneventful except for the strange conversation of Carillion, which kept Limpidus awake at times when, with any other companion, he would have been dozing in his corner. On board the little steamer, which ran from the Italian seaport to

Avlona, there was some discomfort, but the sea was calm and the sense of freedom and adventure pleased Sir Limpidus. He bore with perfect equanimity the inconveniences of a pretentious but uncomfortable inn which sickened Glubber. And when he found himself on horseback in the hills beside Carillion, heading a little caravan of baggage animals, he quite forgot the Name, the Country, and the Property.

'I'll introduce you to the finest gentleman I know, that is to say, if you won't mind the fact that he's a brigand,' shouted George.

'Not a bit!' said Limpidus, 'if you promise not to let out who I am.'

'He doesn't know who I am really,' was the answer. 'I always leave the M.P. part behind me when I come abroad. One learns much more. Those chaps who travel as M.P.'S investigating and inquiring—our district visitors, I call them—simply ask to be deceived. and every rogue who has an axe to grind comes to them naturally. I've known this brigand man for years. He calls me Mr George and regards me merely as a roving Englishman. If I say that you're a friend of mine he'll ask no more, except perhaps to know how many sons you have begotten. I'll tell him that your name is Limpidus, if he inquires. He's absolutely sure to make it into Impetus or Simpson. So you needn't worry.'

'I don't care what I do or where you take me. It's absolutely ripping,' said Sir Limpidus, drawing a deep breath of the mountain air. 'There goes another covey. . . . It's fairly level here. Let's try a gallop. I haven't put this joker through his paces yet. I could turn brigand myself in such a country. I feel game for anything.'

When Glubber at the midday halt beside a stream, where he directed their Albanian servants in the luncheon ceremony, was told that they were going to call upon a brigand, he looked slightly shocked, but answered: 'Oh, indeed, sir,' quite correctly.

'Glubber and I were taken prisoner by brigands once in Asia Minor,' Sir Limpidus explained to his companion. 'They mistook him for a millionaire and made no end of a fuss of him—tied him up, posted sentries on him, and all that, and were going to torture him, when they found out their mistake. He hasn't forgotten that adventure, have you, Glubber?'

'No, nor ever shall, sir,' said the manservant.

'Well, the brigand we are going to see is altogether different. He's a friend of Mr George.'

'Indeed, sir,' answered Glubber, very dubious.

'It's all right, Glubber,' said Carillion. 'He's not a brigand like that low Greek rascal. He's a gentleman of means, a wealthy landowner.'

'That sounds a good deal better, sir, if you'll forgive my saying so,' said Glubber, smiling slightly.

'Of course, you won't tell anybody who we really are?'

'Of course not, after what you told me at Boulong, as you was ill in bed in Berkeley Square, sir,'

The mansion of the wealthy landowner or stronghold of the brigand chief, for he was both, was an old gray castle high up on a mountain-side above a grove of trees which hid a village. The travellers were not allowed to pitch their tents upon his territory, for no sooner did he hear of their approach, than he detailed a posse of retainers to arrest them and conduct them to the castle, where he insisted that they must remain his guests for

several days. He was a handsome graybeard with benevolent blue eyes, and even Limpidus approved of the correctness of his manners.

Sir Limpidus was going to bed upon the night of their arrival when Carillion burst into the room exclaiming :

‘I say, Limpy, there’s going to be fun to-morrow. Leave us alone a minute, will you, Glubber? I want to say a word in private to Sir Limpidus.’

When the servant had gone out he said : ‘We’re in a state of war, our host and all his clan against the people of the next valley; and to-morrow there’s to be a raid. I’ve been with them before. It’s glorious fun—the greatest game in life! I dream of it at home in England. A plunge into the age of chivalry refreshes me. I’ve given myself the treat occasionally ever since I came of age. Of course you won’t come with us, will you? You’re too great a man.’

‘I don’t see how I can,’ said Limpidus regretfully.

But in the morning, when he heard the trumpets sounding in the early sunlight, the clash of arms, the prance of horses, shouts and laughter, and saw the merry faces of the men of war, he flung care to the winds and joined them. In the excitements of that day he quite forgot his own political importance and his duty to society; nor did he think at all consecutively till the evening, when he found himself sitting in a grove of olives with Carillion and their friend the chieftain partaking of a meal which had been cooked upon a fire of dead wood close beside them. It consisted of a sheep from the flock which they had that day taken from the enemy. Carillion had been shot in the right arm.

‘Wasn’t it grand, Limpy?’ George kept on exclaiming

with his mouth full. Every one was hungry. They had done a hard day's work. There had been hours of desultory fighting, followed by a great attack. A village had been captured, pillaged, and then burnt. Men—and, perhaps, a woman or two—had been killed; there were some prisoners, and all the rest of the inhabitants had been driven to the mountains. The victors had lost eight men killed, and many wounded. And Sir Limpidus had thoroughly enjoyed himself.

Only, as he looked at George's impotent right arm, and heard the groans of men more seriously wounded, did he realise the horror of the whole proceeding. It was against all civilised behaviour and all law. And he, Sir Limpidus Fitz-Beare, an Under-Secretary of State to His Britannic Majesty, had thoroughly and recklessly enjoyed it. He shuddered at the thought of the terrific risk which he had run; of the scandal which would have been unavoidable supposing him to have been killed or badly wounded in the fray. He ought to have remembered that Carillion was mad at times; he ought to have stood out against his bad example. A Member of Parliament ought not to do such things.

'It's what we're really meant for—men like you and me,' said George, when made aware of his old friend's repentance. 'Our lives are so damned comfortable that we have to risk them now and then, or we should get too fat and pompous. It's what we're really trained for—fighting—nothing else. There's not a healthy man in England of our sort who does not regard war as a more blessed state than peace.'

'I don't agree with you at all,' said Limpidus, 'though I do think that war brings out the best in nations. We've got into a dreadful state through too much peace. The

people become discontented, wish to pull down everything.'

'But I say, wasn't it absolutely fine?' exclaimed Carillion. 'Did you notice how the smoke from the village hung on the mountain-side just like a cloud? And did you notice when we were at supper in that olive grove how extraordinarily picturesque we all looked in the sunset light?'

Sir Limpidus had noticed nothing of that kind. He had enjoyed the actual fighting and destruction, of which he only now perceived the harm. Nothing would persuade him to go out upon another raid, although the brigand chief, pleased with his conduct on that first occasion, urged him to do so. Carillion's wound provided him with an excuse to stay behind. And when Carillion was well enough to use a gun again, Sir Limpidus persuaded him to leave the castle and return to the avowable pursuit of shooting wildfowl. They stayed another fortnight in the country, then the weather broke, and they were glad enough to seek the shelter of a civilised roof.

On the eve of their departure, Limpidus spoke very seriously to Carillion, saying :—

'I must beg you, George, never to tell any one about our plundering that village. I am bitterly ashamed of the whole business. Glubber, I'm glad to say, has no suspicion of the truth. You have it in your power to ruin me politically. And I must say that if your liking for such mediæval pastimes became known it would tell against you heavily in England.'

'Fear nothing, Limpy dear! We've paired, you know. We've given vent to our real nature just for once. We're really warlike, predatory people. And in

my opinion we are better when that natural bent of ours is undisguised. A soldier is notoriously honest and a politician notoriously the reverse. And the House of Lords is much more truly friendly to the people than the House of Commons, which is supposed to represent the people but does not. The slightest colour of deceit makes scoundrels of us. We were meant to be as simple as "I have."

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE friends reached Charing Cross at dark of a December evening. They had spent ten days upon their homeward journey, stopping at Milan and at Paris by the way.

'We've had a good time, anyhow. I'm feeling clean. It is a nuisance to come back to all this humbug of democracy, legality, and artificial crime,' observed Carillion as they stood together for a moment before parting.

Sir Limpidus smiled. He was too old a parliamentary hand to formulate assent to such a dictum when uttered by a hardened Tory like Carillion.

'You are a damned fraud, Limpy,' said the latter amiably. 'I know you think as I do, and you know that I know; yet you pretend you want to destroy the House of Lords, break up estates, and put the British workman on a pedestal.'

'Better to sacrifice the form than lose the substance,' said Sir Limpidus.

'That's good,' replied Carillion, 'but it's not original. It has been the motto of all trucklers since the world began. However, I don't quarrel with you. You're a British institution. I love you, Limpy, as I love the Nelson column or the Metropolitan police.'

'You talk a lot of nonsense,' said Sir Limpidus.

Leaving Glubber to reclaim his luggage from the customs men, Sir Limpidus went straight to Berkeley

Square. The caretaker had notice of his coming and was ready to receive him, and even to produce a dinner if required, but her ladyship and all the family were down at Clearfount for the Christmas holidays. The young gentlemen—by which was meant the secretaries—came every day to write in the back ground-floor room, but they were nearly always gone by one o'clock.

The empty mansion struck him as depressing, so, having seen his luggage and his man arrive, he went out and dined at his nearest club. A man he knew came up and asked him :—

'What's the latest? I mean about the Cabinet crisis? You should know.'

'I really cannot tell you,' said Sir Limpidus. 'We shall all know to-morrow or the next day, I suppose.'

He had read in that day's *Times*, which he had bought at Dover, that there were likely to be changes in the Cabinet; and that was all he knew upon the subject. But for the sake of Parliament and of the Country he had to feign omniscience before this lay inquirer; who, he was horrified to find in conversation, was unaware that he (Sir Limpidus) had been away.

After that he took a cab to Chelsea and called on Eileen Marden, who was out, and thence to Chester Square in search of Fifi Porter, who was happily at home. She, when she heard that he was practically homeless, commanded him to spend the night at her house, and sent her husband in a cab to warn his valet.

When Sir Limpidus returned to Berkeley Square next morning through a miserable drizzling rain, he found a telephone message from the Prime Minister begging him to go at once to Downing Street. The two secretaries—Roderick was down at Clearfount—breathed

suppressed excitement as Limpidus went out again into the rain.

'Ha, is that you, Fitz-Beare? At last! We've all been crying for you,' exclaimed the Prime Minister when Limpidus was shown into his room. 'We're in a fix, and you alone can get us out of it.'

And then Sir Limpidus was asked in highly flattering terms to accept the post of Secretary of State for the department of which he was now the under secretary, with a seat in the Cabinet. The splendour of the offer took his breath away.

'I doubt if I am really up to it, sir,' he murmured almost humbly, in the tone he would have used at school to the head master.

'I doubt if we're any of us really up to it, if you come to that,' was the half-jocular reply. 'I doubt if anybody in the world is up to it or ever was. Do your best. Put up a good bluff, that is the most that one can ask of any one. The machine, thank God, is solid, and works almost of itself.'

That was the simile which George Carillion always used for the routine of government. It had shocked and irritated Limpidus before, but now it soothed him.

'Well, could you give me just a little time to think it over?'

'I can give you twenty-four hours.'

'Very well, then. You shall have my answer by this time to-morrow.'

'Please make it "yes,"' said the older man as they shook hands.

Sir Limpidus returned to Berkeley Square and sent off Glubber with the luggage. He himself had early luncheon at his club and thought things over. Having

to send a telegram to Clearfount Abbey to announce his coming, he sent another to the Prime Minister, accepting the high office. Everything seemed strange and new to him that day. The journey down to Denderby passed like a dream, and at the station there was the new motor car—which he had not seen before—to meet him. It wafted him to Clearfount in the twinkling of an eye.

The sky had cleared. The setting winter sun reddened one side of the old house and played upon its roofs and chimneys. His wife and children, his old aunts, and several visitors, including Roderick, were on the steps beneath the porch to greet him. There were shouts of welcome. He was hugged and kissed; his hand was warmly shaken. He was troubled with a choking in his throat as if he wished to cry. His Aunt Rose was the first to notice something strange about him, and to ask : 'What is it, Limpidus?'

'Is anything at all the matter?' questioned Lady Gwendolen.

'I have a piece of news for you,' began Sir Limpidus. He paused to clear his throat, and then informed them :

'By this time to-morrow I shall be a Cabinet Minister.'

Roderick and the children bawled 'Hooray!' The aged aunts wept tears of joy. Gwendolen embraced her husband with unusual warmth. The visitors were hearty in congratulations. And then they all went in to the old house which seemed to Limpidus itself to wear just then a happy look, as if the end for which it had been built was now at last achieved : to give a ruler to the English land.

'There's only one thing spoils my pleasure,' he confided to his aunts. 'I wish my dear old father were alive to-day.'

That night at dinner there were toasts and speeches; and the following day the news was spread among the tenants, who sent a deputation to congratulate Sir Limpidus. The neighbouring gentry called by dozens for the same purpose. The mayor and corporation of the town of Denderby, the Liberal Association, various friendly societies, the Rural District Council, and the Board of Guardians presented an address on the occasion.

On Christmas Day there was a crowd at Clearfount church, considerably greater than the sacred building could contain, to see the new-made oligarch at prayer; and the rector, in his sermon, spoke with deep emotion of one whom he had known and loved from childhood, who had risen by sheer weight of worth and Christian virtue to a position of the highest honour in the land.

CHAPTER XXXV

THE press was full of praise of the appointment, for Sir Limpidus had earned the reputation of an all-round man. Some writers of his party even went so far as to proclaim him the most brilliant statesman of the day. But the tribute which gave most delight to the new member of the Cabinet, as showing that he had in truth attained the height of fame, was a cartoon in *Punch* wherein he was depicted as Jack at the top of the beanstalk. He carried that cartoon about with him for many days, deriving secret solace and refreshment from it.

His duties were less heavy than he had expected. It was as if from the possession of three secretaries he had sprung suddenly to the possession of a thousand. The hardest work at first was to remember all their names and all the different subjects which they represented. But there was a secretary whose only business was to jog his memory; so all he had to do was to keep calm. He found good-fellowship among the members of the Cabinet, who, on a close acquaintance, were quite decent men. There was Carraway, whose power of reeling off statistics which nobody could verify, had won for him the reputation of a master of finance. He really cared for nothing in this world but yachting. Then there was the Vat, so named from his capacity for holding liquor without showing it, whose solemn and imposing frown and abrupt speech had much intimidated Limpidus before he came to know him well. He was the most

genial of men, of that old-fashioned sentimental type which loves a pun and is averse to solitude. And Alick, who wrote comic verses, and the Spider, with his thin legs and his goggles and his lantern jaws, whose ambition was to breed a Derby winner, and Bo-peep, devotee of female beauty, and the Oyster, and poor old Deptford, who would talk of the wild days of his youth. These men, who to the outside world appeared so formidable, Limpidus knew as pleasant individuals. He had noticed the same change take place in schoolmasters the moment he arrived at man's estate. All that they asked of their new colleague was some measure of consideration and, perhaps, indulgence; and as that was all that Limpidus required of them, there was no hitch.

When Carillion asked him how he liked Olympus, he replied that it was better than he had anticipated. The responsibility of course was great, but there were so many safeguards, so many experts, to sift out a case before it came to him that it was nothing terrible. Carillion was the only man from whom he had no secrets. This perfect candour was the price he paid for the Albanian outbreak.

'Yes, it's a wonderful machine, it really is,' agreed Carillion, 'I hate it sometimes, but admire it ever. Each post is so arranged, so hedged about, that any fool could fill it creditably.'

'A precious lot you know about it,' said Sir Limpidus.

Carillion took no notice of the interruption.

'The machine is very nearly fool-proof,' he went on. 'Any clever business man could make it ten times more efficient and a million times more economical; but the trouble is that, in so doing, he would make it delicate, a thing that would require an expert in each post. And

you can't always be sure of finding them. Indeed, you may be pretty sure of not finding them in the present state of politics. If a chap with expert knowledge does turn up, you never put him in a job where he can use that knowledge. If he's an expert in agriculture, he's sent to the War Office, and if a Chinese scholar, to the Board of Trade. Every one can quote examples of that sort of thing. How do you account for it, Limpy?'

'I don't account for it, because I don't believe it,' said Sir Limpidus.

It was Sunday evening, and the friends, both happening to be in London for the day of rest, had dined together at a fashionable hotel, and were taking coffee at a little table in the lounge to strains of music when this talk occurred.

'I'll tell you why it is,' pursued Carillion. 'Most people think it muddle and ineptitude. It isn't. It is wisdom—self-preservation—an essential part of the machine. You see the uninitiated think that the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs must be a splendid linguist and a travelled man. As a matter of fact he need not be either. The only important thing is that he should be the type of man who fits into the place assigned to him in the machine. Does your colleague of the Admiralty know anything of the sea and ships? Of course he doesn't, but he knows the parliamentary game. He knows his own position in relation to the other ministries and to the great department of which he is head. From the point of view of sailormen he is a fool, but if a sailorman were put into his place, it might be good for the Navy but it would be very bad for the machine. He'd run the naval part for all it's worth; he'd set a standard and a pace which the other

departments could never for the life of them keep up with, and everything and every one would be upset.

'Now all the older State departments are being run quite well, to everybody's satisfaction, by men who have no knowledge of the subject, men who never think, but simply note and classify and pile up blue books. An expert, if he came along would be astonished at their perfect ignorance of things which seem to him like ABC. He would cry aloud that England was in danger, and clamour for reforms, when really all the fault was in his own stupidity in mistaking a government department for a home of genius. You cannot introduce an expert at this time of day without endangering the whole machine. The "official" expert is another matter. He's an essential part of the machine. He plays the game. But the man who knows too much, and is too much in earnest, must at all costs be kept out. Now do you see it, Limpy?'

'Can't say I'm much enlightened,' said Sir Limpidus. 'I thought you had despaired of the machine, as you call it, long ago.'

'As far as I myself am concerned, yes. I can't fit into it. But I think it very wonderful all the same. It requires a class of men who are surprised at nothing, who take things as they come along, and have no diffidence and no convictions; a class of men who find it natural to give commands without thought or hesitation, and to blow up underlings for small mistakes in work which they themselves are quite incapable of doing; men who, if they happen to be clever, and they sometimes are, are disciplined enough to dull their cleverness, cut down their knowledge to the common level and, in short, keep step.'

'I'm glad you find some good to speak of us for once,' said Limpidus.

'And of that class of men, you, Limpy, are the type. I've had the same advantages as you have, but they didn't take on me. My speech at any moment is still in close relation to my feelings at that moment. I ought by rights to be a revolutionary, I suppose, and so perhaps I should be if I didn't happen to be rich enough to get away at times and live with savages. As it is, I stand by the machine, outside it always.'

'You remind me of that wretched fellow, Galloway. He talked like that—only much worse—the day he gave me notice. Now there's another clever fellow—just the opposite of you. For he's at heart an utter revolutionary. The mask was off that day; and he went straight for all of us. He's only a Conservative in order to get on in life.'

'He may get on if he can discipline himself to that extent.'

'You see him sometimes, don't you? What's he doing?'

'Nursing a big constituency in the Midlands. He's pretty certain to get in, I think.'

'I must say I feel deeply hurt at his behaviour. After being with me all those years, to turn against me! He's confoundedly clever, and now he'll come in as my rival, and attack me. I don't mind telling you, George, I'm a bit afraid of him. He's behaved damnably.'

'You needn't be afraid, he won't attack you,' said Carillion, laughing. 'You evidently do not realise the dignity which the machine confers on one who fits it perfectly as you do. Even I, who know you well, am sometimes awed.'

'Oh, shut up!' said Sir Limpidus disgustedly. 'But, I say, do you think he'll make a name?'

'A name like yours, he cannot! He, poor fellow, has been feeling bitter all along because he thinks success in this our country an affair of brains, and he has better brains than you have. He hasn't had our training; he hasn't our inherited traditions; he is sometimes shy; he has no presence and no inborn habit of command. Even if you started equal, he'd be handicapped. And now you're a Cabinet Minister, he's quite out of the running.'

It was at that moment that a man passed by them walking with two ladies fashionably dressed. He did not see them. The two friends stared at one another. It was Galloway himself, and the ladies were well known to both of them.

'Now, there, you see,' remarked Sir Limpidus, with ire. 'He would never have known those people but for Gwendolen and me. He met them down at Clearfount, and he's hanging on to them. He's not so shy as you suppose. He's getting on. After the way he treated me, it makes me sick.'

'Don't be a tyrant, Limpy. It's un-English and the machine won't stand it,' said Carillion, laughing.

Sir Limpidus was in no danger of becoming that. His feeling against Galloway was not vindictive, but defensive. The man had proved himself his enemy and might attack him. But this foreboding, far from poisoning his blood like active hate, was only plaintive and occasional, nor did it mar his equable, serene existence. The life of a Cabinet Minister was not all drudgery. The Under Secretary did the dull routine work and represented the department in the House except on great occasions.

Sir Limpidus went down to the House when he felt so disposed, sank wearily on the front bench, put his feet on the table, locked his hands behind his head, and sprawled there, gazing at the Chamber's lofty roof. It was the privilege of his position thus to advertise contempt, and he never failed to loll thus, even when the attitude fatigued him; just as, when he had attained to sixth-form rank at school, he never failed to wear a buttonhole, turn up his trousers and the collar of his coat, and walk in the middle of the road, all things which boys in lower forms were not allowed to do.

There were 'political' week-ends in noble houses, where politics were the last subject which the guests discussed. He was at his place in Scotland for the grouse, at Clearfount for the partridges, as usual. Newmarket Heath and Epsom Downs, Ascot and Goodwood, saw him in their season. At Marienbad and Biarritz he was a familiar figure; and he had a villa of his own upon the Riviera, with terraced gardens sloping to the sea, in which he spent at least a week of every year.

CHAPTER XXXVI

It was the first day of the cricket match between two ancient public schools; and all the rank and fashion of the town had come to Lord's. In compliance with his son's request, repeated in innumerable letters, Sir Limpidus Fitz-Beare had put a stage-coach on the ground, which served as caravan for Lady Gwendolen and all the family. Numbers of bright-faced little boys in Eton suits and toppers, each wearing a large button-hole and carrying a stick adorned with a tassel of the school colour, crawled in and out of it at the behest of Limpidus the younger, who was in his glory.

• Sir Limpidus himself, arriving about three o'clock, was welcomed by his children with delight. His son at once presented him to half a dozen of his schoolfellows with whom the Secretary of State shook hands indulgently. And then his son must walk with him to show him off. The little flutter his appearance caused, the way the well-dressed people nudged each other, was amusing.

His son held on to his left arm and chattered :—

'Do you know what I'm thinking, dad? I'm thinking how absolutely ripping it is to have a father who's a real swell. You are a real swell, aren't you, no mistake about it?'

'I understand that people in our position are called swells by people of another class,' Sir Limpidus replied in his official manner.

'I don't mean that,' the boy replied impatiently. 'I mean that you are really a great man. You've done things like Napoleon and the Duke of Wellington and Shakespeare and Sir Isaac Newton and Lord Kitchener.'

'I think you're wrong, my boy. I don't resemble any of them.'

His son here pinched his arm and stamped impatiently.

'You know quite well what I'm driving at. You're not an ordinary man. I am so jolly glad you're here, and that we've got a coach and all. I want all the fellows to see you; that's why I'm walking you about. They say you're the hope of the country, the only good man in the Government; do you hear, dad? And it's a double compliment, because they're nearly all Conservatives. And, dad, they say you've got a strong face. Let me look!'

Sir Limpidus looked down upon his son and heir affectionately; patting the hand which clutched the sleeve of his immaculate frock-coat. His face was strongly marked in frowning lines, like that of every Englishman of leading—a forbidding face to those who did not know the simple, honest soul which it concealed.

'Hallo, Fitz-Beare!' A soldier-like, frock-coated figure, six feet high, stood in the way. 'You don't mean to say you've got a boy of that age?'

It was Satan, though Sir Limpidus was careful not to use the nickname. The conversation was in parliamentary language because of the boy's presence. Only when young Limpidus ran off to speak to some acquaintance of his age did Satan become natural, saying:—

'Well, you — old fool, what the — do you think you're doing in this Government? Helping to wreck the — country. You always were a rotter. . . .

Haven't seen your ugly features for an age. Come and see us some week-end. Jane will be pleased. We're always in the country now, like hedgehogs. . . . Who's the Holy Joe your boy's got hold of? He's bearing down on us. I'm off.'

And he strolled on just in time to escape the fervent onrush of a clerical head master to greet a ruler of his country, hat in hand.

'Sir Limpidus, I begged my young friend here to ask you, as a favour, if you would be so good as to come down to us some evening, as my guest, and give the boys a speech upon some subject—a speech they may remember as an influence in after life. No one more highly qualified than your distinguished self. . . . Some time in the winter term. We should be well content to leave the date to you.'

Sir Limpidus agreed good-naturedly. His son exclaimed 'Hooray!' and clapped his hands. It would, in truth, be a majestic day for him when his governor came down as the head master's guest and spoke to the assembled multitude. His father ought to be a Governor. He would be, the head master said, at the next vacancy.

Limpidus too looked forward to that function with unusual pleasure, as rounding off a creditable portion of his life. He had not forgotten it when he returned to London in the autumn; and already had fixed a date for it in his own mind when the head master wrote requesting him to do so. He gave himself some trouble with the speech. For once he wrote the whole thing out himself, without other help than that afforded by the admiration of the faithful Glubber, to whom he read out passages which he thought good. The tone was sentimental and the substance highly moral. When he took

it to one of his secretaries to be copied out, he saw the rascal grin as he began to read it. Perhaps the righteous colour was laid on too thickly; he would tone it down. Having obtained a fair copy of his lucubrations, he took it first to Gwendolen, desiring her opinion; but she cried out that it was sure to be all right. Then he went to Eileen, who admired it but objected that it seemed to her a little bit too pious to appeal to schoolboys. She suggested some facetious touches of a simple kind. But by misfortune while they were engaged upon that delicate artistic work, who should be announced but Lady Bulliter—his sister Agatha. She burst into the room attended by her latest swain, a Mr Caracole, and took possession of it. When she heard what they were doing, she proposed that they should write one after another, as in 'Consequences'; it would be much funnier and quite as edifying for the hapless boys. She had no respect whatever for the statesman, and she wanted to play bridge.

Sir Limpidus was fairly routed. He withdrew after exchanging a long-suffering glance with Eileen. He then betook himself to Fifi Porter, who went over the whole speech with him, helping to change its serious tone for one more joyful. She was a clever woman and she knew his style.

It was with feelings of replete benevolence that, after a good dinner at the head master's house, Sir Limpidus took his seat upon a platform facing rows and rows of boys in black with clean white collars, cuffs, and shirt-fronts which gave back the light. It was with tender feelings, born of the remembrance of his own beginnings in that ancient school, in which his father and his grandfather had been inured before him, and where his son

was now in process of inurement, that he rose when the head master had pronounced his eulogy, took a step forward and began :—

‘Dr Aniseed, ladies, gentlemen, and my dear boys, I confess that I am shy of speaking in this awful place. Remembered terrors throng around me. The voice of a head master makes me shaky at the knees. For strange as it may seem to some of you, I too was once a boy—an innocent, misguided boy—and I was in this school. I am afraid I was not a very good boy. I have a faint recollection—let me whisper it—of being birched for some delinquency. But if I have mended my ways, if I have become something in the world, and have become of service to my country and my fellow-men since then, this grand old school, with its traditions and its discipline, the code of honour which its corporate life inspires, the high ideals which its masters inculcate—this school and all it stands for, made me so. It made me what I am, and it made my father what he was. And it will make all of you, if you will let it, proper Englishmen—men useful to your country, fit to gain distinction in the Senate, at the Bar, in the Army or the Navy, and I must not forget the noblest calling of them all—the Church.’ He half turned and bowed towards the head master, who looked very suave. ‘Now, I have been asked to tell you to-night something about the work of a great Government department. I only know my own department at all thoroughly, and I shall try to give you some idea of that.

‘To begin with my own work as Secretary of State, that is to say, as head—some disrespectful people call it figure-head—of a great Government department on an ordinary day—’

He then proceeded to detail his doings from the early morning cup of tea to the glass of mineral water which he always drank before going to bed. Then he went on to the work of his subordinates. He told them that the paper used in the department if it could be laid out flat continuously would cover every inch of Yorkshire, Durham, and Northumberland. He told them that the ink employed in the department every year would fill the Serpentine to overflowing; and many other interesting things of the same kind, having been supplied with his statistics by a secretary who had a turn for such ingenious computations. People thought that clerks in Government offices did no work. The truth was that they worked as hard as any one. If they were to stop work for a single day, the whole British Empire would be thrown completely out of gear. They were a conscientious, patriotic set of men for whom he had a great respect; and he was proud to say that all—or very nearly all—of them came from our great public schools. So long as men of that type were our public servants, the British Empire was secure and would go on increasing; and so forth.

Young Limpidus was admitted to the head master's drawing-room afterwards, to the *conversazione* held in honour of his father. The masters were all loud in praises of the speech, and wished that all statesmen were so upright and high-minded. It was some time before Sir Limpidus could get away from them. His heir meanwhile tucked in at the refreshments, and was a little startled when a hand was laid upon his shoulder and a voice said: 'Well, my son?'

'Oh, it was quite all right, of course,' young Limpidus conceded. 'Only the fellows were a bit disappointed.'

They wanted you to talk about yourself, the things you've done, in Parliament and foreign countries, and all that.'

'I've not done anything to make a speech about,' said Sir Limpidus after a moment's hesitation.

His triumph as a statesman was not one of doing. It was the natural consequence of being what he was. If it came to doing, he had fought a duel in his youth, and in Albania had assisted to burn down a village. Those incidents in his career were not fit subjects for a speech to schoolboys; and besides them in the way of doing, there was nothing but pursuit of women and field sports. So it was with a smile over the double meaning of the words that he repeated:—

'I've done nothing to make a speech about.'

The head master, following his distinguished guest, happened to overhear this mild disclaimer, and he laughed aloud, calling his colleagues round him to enjoy the classic joke.

Sir Limpidus Fitz-Bearé declared that he had never in his life done anything worth mentioning. Verily an utterance which ought to be preserved in books along with other modest dicta of the truly great. The masters all embroidered on the theme with philosophical reflections and historic parallels; the master's wives sat round and smiled encouragement. And Sir Limpidus was well content, since they did all the talking. He returned to London after midnight with a mind at rest. The heart of the country was sound; the game of politics was safe, so long as men so decent and right-thinking upheld the great traditions of our public schools.

CHAPTER XXXVII

A YEAR had passed. Sir Limpidus was down at Clearfount in September. He was walking through the stubble on a sunny morning, his gun beneath his arm, a keeper and two dogs behind him, when he heard his own name shouted in respectful tones and saw, behind a hedge, a footman from the Abbey waving what seemed to be a telegram. It proved to be a message from the chief of his department, informing him that there was serious trouble in Fulanistan.

'Fulanistan, where's that?' he said within himself, adding aloud: 'Well, Jakes, go back at once and find Mr Roderick. Tell him to call up Sir Rupert Terebinth at the office, and to tell him that I can't come up to-day; it's quite impossible. I'll come to-morrow for an hour or two. Mr Roderick will ask Sir Rupert for the details of the business, and he will take down what he says, word for word. Can you remember that?'

'Yes, sir,' replied the footman.

Sir Limpidus pursued the path of sport in common with, yet separately from, his guests, with whom he kept in line but at a shouting distance. Fair ladies shared their luncheon in a pleasant glade and walked with them throughout the afternoon. The party returned home at half-past four. Sir Limpidus then had a bath and changed his clothes, refreshed himself with tea and conversation, then went round the stables with his friends and had a comfortable talk before he dressed for dinner.

The dinner was enlivened by the presence of a lady who at that time was an object of attention to Sir Limpidus. There was opportunity for tender conversation afterwards. And, when the ladies had retired to rest, there was a jolly conference of sportsmen in the gun-room. It was after twelve o'clock before Sir Limpidus went up to bed. Glubber was waiting for him.

'These came for you, sir, all through the afternoon,' he said, pointing to a pile of messages and telegrams five inches high.

'Confound it,' muttered Limpidus. 'I can't be bothered.' He did, however, give a look to them before undressing. They were all to the same tune of 'Come at once.' British officials had been murdered in Fulanistan.

'Where on earth is Fulanistan? And what does it matter?' he inquired of the wall-paper.

The murder of British officials was a nuisance certainly; but it could not reasonably be allowed—by him at any rate—to weigh against his strong desire to go to sleep.

And on the morrow when he read the messages more carefully, as he went up to London, he could perceive no reason why they should have troubled him. It seemed to him a matter of routine. People were always being murdered somewhere; and the permanent officials ought to have a printed form to meet the case. He had informed them plainly that he needed rest. Besides that, most of them were men in a position to know the worth of the first days of partridge-shooting. He resolved to give Sir Rupert Terebinth a blowing-up.

But when he met Sir Rupert face to face, he was dumbfounded by the news that grave official had to tell. Fulanistan was not so far away. There was a

Fulanistan Society, composed of noisome cranks, in London. And the Government officials had been done to death, not merely for the fun of the thing in the accustomed way of savage races, but because of certain grievances the natives had against them. There had been complaints. The governor—a Mr Philip Chayter—had cabled that there was a chance of a rebellion. He asked for leave to place the country under martial law. The murderers—about a hundred of them—were already executed. And that was the most ticklish part of the whole business; for the self-constituted champions of Fulanistan in London—a pestilent group of cranks, as aforesaid—had begun to make a fuss about those executions, to call them an atrocity, and agitate for an inquiry. There were already hostile comments in the press.

Sir Rupert here produced a sheaf of snippets.

‘I can’t be bothered with all that,’ exclaimed Sir Limpidus, repelling them. ‘We, of course, support the governor and the officials on the spot. It seems to me a matter of routine. I cannot see that there was any need to call me up.’

‘You must be present, sir. We cannot take responsibility in such a crisis. There may be worse news any minute. At any rate, there will be questions you alone can settle.’

‘Well, I must say it’s a most abominable nuisance!’

‘I quite agree, and I am sorry that we have to trouble you. But none of us are competent to deal with these important matters.’

‘Very well,’ Sir Limpidus agreed with a bad grace. ‘I’ll come up twice a week till the fuss is over. Of course, the men upon the spot know all about it. Tell the

governor to take what measures he considers necessary. Assure him of my full protection—er—and sympathy.'

'Will you write a message we can cable to him and sign it, please?'

'Make some one type it out. I'll sign it right enough,' replied Sir Limpidus, producing his cigar-case, 'I say, Terebinth, have you heard the latest about Tottie Peveril and poor old Dibs?'

'Forgive me, but there is still a good deal to be settled. We cannot let this agitation in the press go unopposed. We must send out private information to the editors. What shall we say?'

'We haven't any information, have we?'

'Not much. The official report of the murders appeared yesterday. By misfortune, the report of the executions appeared at the same time and in the same paragraph, so that the casual reader might suppose that there was not a trial.'

'Was there a trial, do you think?' inquired Sir Limpidus, leaning back in his arm-chair and smoking his cigar contentedly.

'Undoubtedly. Of course, there must have been,' replied Sir Rupert flurriedly.

'Well, all you've got to do is to send out a paragraph stating that there has been some slight trouble in Fulanistan, but owing to the energetic action of the governor, the danger is now past, and that, in short, we have the situation well in hand. Anything more I can do to set your mind at rest?'

Sir Rupert mentioned certain other matters, which his chief disposed of in the same imperial way.

'Now get that message typed for me to sign, there's a good fellow. And never lose your head again about

so small a matter. You ought to know me well enough by this time to be sure that I'll stand by you, even if you made a howler, which you never would.'

He rose and laid his hand upon the permanent official's shoulder, as he added: 'Cheer up! It'll soon blow over.'

But Sir Limpidus was forced, ere long, to own that he was no true prophet. The storm did not blow over, it went on increasing; and was at its height when Parliament reassembled. It was so considerable as to rouse alarm in ministers, who all looked to Sir Limpidus as their defence.

Sir Limpidus himself was angry, not alarmed. Tremendous diatribes against him had appeared in the Opposition newspapers, and even in some so-called Liberal publications. A spirit of irreverence and insubordination was abroad which much incensed him. The malaperts denounced him as a Russian despot. He wished he could be, for a day, to cleanse the world of them. But outwardly he was as calm as usual.

When questioned hotly in the House he answered nothing in the proper formulas, and with the cold, judicial manner which commands respect. The friends of Fulanistan spoke of the inhabitants thereof as people having a respectable civilisation of their own, which astonished Sir Limpidus, who had supposed them to be utter savages. But his face did not betray the least surprise.

'What sort of people are they, really?' he inquired of Terebinth.

'I only know that they are orthodox Mohammedans. It was alleged yesterday—for the first time, I think—by Professor Dolby, in a letter to the *Times*, that the

officials had insulted their religion. And referring to the last report of Mr Chayter, I find that something of the sort is hinted.'

'We can't admit it,' said Sir Limpidus decidedly. 'But I know all about Mohammedans. I've been in Turkey.'

'Then perhaps you will be able to explain all this.' Sir Rupert handed him a sheaf of papers which he had been holding all the while. It was a long despatch from the governor, containing a full statement of the grievances of the inhabitants in so far as he (the governor) could make them out. Mr Chayter had been informed that certain natives in the troubled districts complained of interference with their law of marriage and inheritance.

'And there you can, no doubt, enlighten us,' said Sir Rupert. 'What is the Moslem law of marriage and inheritance?'

'Hanged if I know. Look it up,' replied Sir Limpidus.

'We have, but no one can make head or tail of it.'

'There must be men in England who know all about it.'

'They're all against us. They'd simply raise a hue and cry over our ignorance, and tell the people you were quite unfit to be in power because you do not happen to know much about their special subject.'

'Send round a question to the India Office, they're bound to know.'

'That has been done. We have their answer, written by a learned Indian. But without an expert's knowledge it is unintelligible.'

'Well, well, I'll see what I can do,' agreed Sir Limpidus.

He went off to his club and asked two men, both of them Eastern travellers, but they could not enlighten

him; then on to Fifi Porter, whom he took to lunch at the Savoy.

'Nobody seems to know,' he told Sir Rupert in the afternoon. 'And, really, 'pon my soul, what does it matter?'

'It matters a good deal, I fear. Just look at this.' Sir Rupert handed him an evening paper with the headlines: 'Trouble in Fulanistan. Ignorance and muddle. Sir Limpidus Fitz-Beare must go. Professor Dolby on the situation.'

'There's notice of a question on that very subject of the law of marriage and inheritance, and the slightest slip in the reply would give us all away.'

'There won't be any slip,' replied Sir Limpidus.

The reply, composed with care by Fifi Porter's brother, was simply an indignant protest against the attitude of certain members who chose to regard every British official as, *prima facie*, the worst of criminals. As far as his (Sir Limpidus's) information went, the state of things in Fulanistan, so far from being that depicted with so much—he thought misplaced—emotion by the honourable member, bore not the least resemblance to that figment of a hyperbolic and diseased imagination. The volume of the cries of 'No' and 'Shame,' which mitigated the applause when he sat down, showed that the house was not entirely satisfied. The high disdain with which he parried their most deadly thrusts angered the Fulanistani faction to the point of frenzy. Gathering their strength together for a final effort, they held a meeting in the Albert Hall, which their enemy attended in disguise, with George Carillion, who was much amused by the proceedings which appalled Sir Limpidus.

'Fitz-Beare the Cossack! Fitz-Beare the Russian

tyrant ! Fitz-Beare the murderous savage ! Fitz-Beare must go !' roared one democratic orator, gesticulating like a madman. 'In the name of mercy, in the name of Christianity, in the name of humanity, that blot on England's fame, that wretch without compassion, who sneers at human suffering and gloats on butchery, must be expelled with ignominy from the high position he disgraces.'

Another speaker, of a wild religious turn, compared Sir Limpidus Fitz-Beare to Pontius Pilate. And yet another spoke of him as 'that unhappy man.'

The horror of Sir Limpidus went on increasing to the end, when a man whom he knew well, a member of his party, who was in the chair, smiling, declared that those disgraceful speeches reflected the best spirit of the English race.

'Good Lord !' he gasped, as he strode out, grasping the arm of George Carillion for support. 'What are we coming to ? I only wish I *was* a Russian and could pack the brutes off to Siberia or have 'em shot ! I'm thoroughly disgusted. After all I've done.'

'Don't be afraid of them. They're only cranks, chuckled Carillion. 'The hall was not a quarter full. They're absolutely harmless when you let them talk. Ignore them, Limpy, and you'll be as safe as houses. After a thorough good blow-out like this they'll quiet down.'

In fact, the storm abated after that, and Limpidus received congratulations from his colleagues on his statesmanlike behaviour through the crisis. If some firebrands on his own side of the House had turned against him, he had won the confidence of all true Englishmen, and his public reputation now stood higher than before.

He had put Fulanistan out of his mind completely, when a long report arrived from Mr Chayter, the governor, headed: 'Proposed Reforms.' The chief official on the spot was of opinion that reforms were needed, and he ventured to submit a few suggestions to the Secretary of State.

'Reforms! When all the fuss is over!' cried Sir Limpidus. 'The man's a perfect nuisance. He must go.'

Mr Chayter was recalled before three months were past, and Fifi Porter's cousin was appointed in his stead.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THOUGH Sir Limpidus had thus triumphantly survived the ordeal of vituperation, it had disturbed his peace of mind, revealing to him diabolical, unruly forces at work, not only in the great mass of the people, but also among the educated. He was conscious of a growing danger to the State, and felt the need to watch its progress on his own account. Therefore he hired a person of discretion to go to public meetings of the baser sort and study the proceedings upon his behalf. He thus learnt with amazement that he had become anathema to all the socialists, anarchists, vegetarians, pacifists, free-thinkers, and other political riff-raff in the kingdom. He felt as one who walks on a volcano. And about that time he came in contact with the suffragettes.

He was walking home one evening along Bruton Street, watching the sunset through the leafless trees in Berkeley Square, when a woman sprang upon him from a doorstep, knocked his hat off, kicked his shins, and struck him in the face, exclaiming : 'There, you brute !' Twice mud was thrown at him as he was going into the House, and once, as he was walking along Bond Street, a large stone whizzed past his head and broke the window of a chemist's shop.

Could such things be in England? He declared in all companies that human ingenuity could not possibly devise a punishment too cruel for those furies, and was shocked to find that every one did not agree with him.

His wife, though she cared nothing for the vote, objected to see women roughly treated. Fifi laughed, and Eileen had the impudence to argue with him. She actually dared to call those monsters of her sex, 'heroic women.' A quarrel followed, and he saw no more of her for many weeks.

There was a general election, and, although he was, as usual, unopposed, he felt obliged to visit his constituency. On his way to address a meeting in the Town Hall at Denderby, as he alighted from his motor-car, he was attacked by screaming women, had his hat bashed in, his face scratched, and his collar crumpled. The law-abiding folk of Denderby rushed to his rescue, wreaking vengeance on the women, who were nearly lynched; while he was escorted by police into the hall where, from the platform, he abused the suffragettes in simple language with immense applause.

Perusing the result of the elections in the newspaper, he jumped as if he had been stung on seeing that Galloway had beaten Arthur Clax, a minister. His former dread of Galloway as a potential rival overshadowed him as he sat glaring at the names and figures in the *Times*. It was Lady Gwendolen who, later in the day, discovered in the same paper the said Galloway's engagement to the Lady Wilhelmina Fox-Rabbitts, more familiarly known as 'Goo-Goo' to her friends and enemies. She showed the notice to her husband with a face of high disdain.

'Yes, hang the fellow! He is getting on!' sighed Limpidus.

'He shan't get on in that way,' she replied. 'Why, Goo-Goo Rabbitts is as old as I am, and we hate one another like poison. I'm not going to let her annex my

Mr Galloway. . . . What will you give me, Limpidus, if I reclaim him for you?’

‘You won’t, so there’s an end of that!’ replied Sir Limpidus.

Meeting Galloway in the lobby of the House of Commons, the minister made a point of shaking hands with him and asking how he did. The fellow had the grace to look a bit ashamed.

Agatha joined the suffragettes. The first he heard of it was from the lips of Fifi, who had come across the name of Lady Bulliter in a list of persons who had taken part in some absurd procession. And it was while this new delinquency of hers still rankled freshly in his mind that Agatha must needs approach him with a cool request. She had got into debt upon a friend’s account (or so she said) and could not ask her husband for the money. If Limpidus would let her have five hundred pounds until she got her next half year’s allowance, she would be obliged.

‘I promise faithfully to pay you back in June. I’d do the same for you, you know, at any time.’

‘I have not got five hundred pounds to lend,’ he said severely; ‘and if I had I should not lend it to you for a purpose undefined. . . . How can you expect me to be pleased to see you, Agatha, when you will persist in bringing shame upon us all.’ And he proceeded to recount her past iniquities, concluding with, ‘And now you’ve joined the suffragettes.’

‘Thank you,’ she said. ‘That is so like you, Limpidus! What have my love-affairs or my being a suffragette got to do with it? I shouldn’t refuse you anything because you’re a polygamist or because you’re a Liberal. But, never mind. That’s you all over. I shall pay you out.’

'I suppose you mean you'll tell my wife some stories.

'Oh, no ! She doesn't care a button what you do. I'll find some better way to make you squirm.'

'Control your temper; you are talking nonsense,' Sir Limpidus remarked, and rang the bell.

Some three weeks after that refusal a most extraordinary incident occurred. Sir Limpidus had been to see the Russian ballet, and afterwards had supper *tête-à-tête* with Fifi in a private room at a good restaurant. Nobody knew of that arrangement, he believed, except themselves, the manager, and the head-waiter. They were both, perhaps, a little fuddled as they left the place. Seeing the door of a motor-car held open for them by a perfect footman, Limpidus supposed that the said car belonged to Fifi, and Fifi, for her part, supposed that it belonged to Limpidus. They had both got in, the door was shut upon them, and the car was moving, before they realised that some one else was present. Then Limpidus became aware of something laid upon his face with a peculiar smell, and was aware of nothing more till he awoke to find himself alone in a strange room without a rag of clothing.

Somewhere in the building there was a continuous noise of talk and laughter, women's voices. Suppose a woman should come in and find him naked ! He looked about him frantically for some covering. A woman's kimono, the worse for wear, hung on a peg behind the door. He put that on as best he could, and turned the handle of that door, meaning to have a look for his own clothes.

He found himself in a passage, leading to some stairs. He had crept to the stairhead, when he heard some one

coming up. He fled back, opened the first door he came to, and found himself in a room full of women.

'The prisoner! Behold our prisoner!' was shouted. There were screams of laughter followed by much clapping. Two stalwart damsels came and stood as guards beside him, while an older lady of benevolent, refined appearance approached him with a deprecating little smile, exclaiming:—

'Please excuse the girls for laughing, dear Sir Limpidus, but you do indeed look comical. Please stand quite still. . . . That's right. You have been photographed in that costume at our headquarters. We shall print copies of the photograph and send them round to all your friends if you should ever fail to keep the compact you are going to make with us. . . . Oh, yes! You're going to make it,' she continued archly, wagging her head at his expression of reluctance, 'or else, you see, we shall not give you back your clothes.'

Sir Limpidus was fast recovering from his bewilderment. He noticed some extremely pretty, well-groomed girls whose aspect recommended female suffrage. He was not disinclined to come to terms with them.

'Let's go into another room,' said the old lady. 'Miss Willoughby! Miss Drake! I want you, please!'

Two of the pretty girls he had already noticed, followed them into a small committee-room, where Sir Limpidus, from force of habit, took the chair.

'First,' said the old lady, 'I should like to set your mind at rest upon a subject which I fear may have distressed you needlessly. You were disrobed by persons of your own sex—in fact, by two of our male sympathisers to whom I hope to introduce you presently.'

Sir Limpidus was not attending. He replied: 'I suppose you wish me to support your movement for the future. Well, I agree to that. I'll change my attitude. Anything more?'

'There's only one thing more. You are a rich man, Sir Limpidus. Your sister is in need of some pecuniary help.'

'Agatha? Confound her, yês; I might have guessed it. . . . Well, she shall have the money.' His mind kept calling up alarming visions of what must be occurring through his absence; the danger to the country, the confusion in the Government. He signed the documents they placed before him without more discussion.

'Now, if you go back to your room,' said the old lady, 'your clothes will be restored to you at once.'

'What is the time?'

'Ten minutes to eleven,' replied Miss Willoughby, consulting a wrist-watch.

'I can't go home in the middle of the day in evening dress.'

'I was going to suggest,' said the old lady, 'that you should stop with us and make friends, while some one goes to fetch your other clothes. Mrs Porter, your companion of last night, is on the premises. She, too, has joined us, I am glad to say. She can go home in clothes which we have lent to her, and there devise some plan to get the clothes which you require without arousing comment. You must write a note. You naturally would not wish even your man to know that you are here with us.'

So it was arranged. Sir Limpidus, in evening dress, unshaven, stayed amid that crowd of women, not unwillingly, for he found some of them amazingly

attractive; and now he took their capture of him as a compliment.

'I say,' he confided jocularly to Miss Drake. 'It's not quite fair. You know that I shall never tell a soul about this business. But how can I make sure of all of you? Women can't keep a secret. You will let it out.'

'Oh, shall we?' said Miss Drake. 'You do not know us. And if we do, you can officially deny it, can't you?'

CHAPTER XXXIX

HIS conversion to the cause of Woman Suffrage did Sir Limpidus no harm, although it altered his political relations. Men who had been till then his close allies sheered off from him; but others, who till then had disapproved of him, drew near. He took up the position of an absolutely honest thinker who, when once convinced of the validity of a demand, became its champion. He attended meetings in connection with the women's movement, and found that a good deal could be said in favour of it. But the mixed crowd at those meetings made him sick at heart. There were women hardly human in appearance who called for fire and bloodshed with the shriek of furies. There were men of horrible unkempt demeanour who spoke of revolution as the goal of life. It angered him to see delightful girls like Gertrude Drake and Dora Willoughby associating with those ruffians just as freely as they did with him.

The more progressive he became in outward seeming and repute, the more he saw of the atrocious thing which they called Progress, the more he loathed and dreaded the ideals of democracy. He saw the pestilence of independent and unlicensed thought spreading, unchecked, among the multitude to the destruction of all decent order and all discipline. It made him sad. If that was the result of England's boasted liberty, he thought despotic Russia happy in comparison.

Although his visits to that lower world of movements

and ideas were but occasional, remembrance of them dogged him in the higher life, like a foul spectre always lurking in the shadows. Eileen he no longer trusted, though their friendship was resumed. Fifi, his fellow-convert and true sympathiser, had thrown herself into the women's movement heart and soul. Gertrude Drake and Dora Willoughby were mad on politics. Gradually he was driven back upon his wife and family for solid sympathy and true support. Gwendolen at least had no unfeminine proclivities and did pay some regard to his opinion and convenience. His eldest son was in the Guards, a gallant fellow. His second boy would soon go up to Cambridge. His elder daughter, a good-looking girl, had lately been presented to her sovereign. The Country might be going to the devil, but the Name, the Family, the Property, remained a source of pride.

Gwendolen was happy in those days, and therefore amiable, for she had brought the truant Galloway to heel at last, and managed somehow to detach him from the hated Goo-Goo. He was often in the house or in attendance on her out of doors.

'Don't think I want him for myself,' she told her husband. 'But I could not have him captured by the enemy. And I am glad to be assured that I have still enough attraction to make him do exactly what I wish.'

She looked so handsome and vivacious as she said the words, that Sir Limpidus could understand her conquest of a man like Galloway. He himself had lost his fear of that outsider, together with all sense of rivalry with one so docile to his wife's commands. He was once more glad to meet him as a clever fellow, and even to consult him in a kindly way. He learnt that Galloway was not opposed to votes for women.

'I don't say it's desirable or right,' explained his former secretary. 'But I think the people who oppose it are upon the losing side.'

'You think the suffragists will win?' asked Lady Gwendolen. 'I don't care one way or the other really, but I hate the mob.'

'I hate the suffragettes,' remarked her elder daughter. 'I cannot understand why dad sticks up for them.'

'I don't stick up for them when they transgress the law,' Sir Limpidus corrected her; 'but I consider their demand both just and reasonable.'

'I can't think why,' said George Carillion, who was present, for this conversation took place at a dinner-party; 'it's not a bit in character for you.'

'I think, with Galloway, that it is bound to come,' replied Sir Limpidus. He was much pleased with Galloway's expressed opinion, liking to feel himself upon the winning side.

Carillion (who had just returned from Africa) asked afterwards: 'What really made you change your views on that and other subjects? I hear of you on all hands as a man of dangerous, advanced ideas.'

Sir Limpidus replied: 'Advanced, perhaps, but never dangerous. . . . One's views enlarge as one grows older. After studying the question, I arrived at the conclusion that Woman Suffrage, if not exactly necessary, is required by justice. And I have spoken in support of it. But don't suppose that I approve of lawlessness. I am appalled by half the speeches I am forced to hear. . . . What is the matter with the country, George? We do our best to satisfy the people, yet things get worse and worse. There are these labour troubles; and the

Irish question, very near a civil war. The people everywhere are getting out of hand. They're quite undisciplined. Conscription is the thing for them, but if we tried it they would fire us out.'

'The best thing for us would be war,' declared Carillion. 'We're getting fanciful and invalidish, full of fads. I speak of men like you and me, who like the thought of fighting, having been trained to think it sport and rather jolly. But chaps who think it earnest might fall foul of us. We don't know how they'd take it, for we've never asked them. We keep them in the dark when we're supposed to tell them everything. We are the country, and we know it. But they think themselves the country. We've told them they are everything, and we are nothing but their public servants, and they expect us to conform our conduct to our protestations.'

'I think you're altogether wrong,' pronounced Sir Limpidus. 'But anyhow the country's in a shocking state.'

Even at Clearfount he was conscious of some growth of disaffection. The village people had put off their ancient courtesy. The education given in the schools unsettled them, so Glubber told him, making them discontented with the simple pleasures of the Bell or the King's Head. And fewer people went to church on Sunday mornings.

In his own class, also, there was a decline of dignity. Agatha, who, from shouting 'Votes for Women,' had become a socialist, now took her lovers from the ranks of Labour; and even Lady Gwendolen was obliged to know a certain number of impossibles, because it had become the fashion so to do.

It was a relief for him to fly to Russia from this state of things, and spend a fortnight in a country which was still in order.

Soon after his return from that brief holiday, he had a truly terrible experience. In a northern city, an enormous audience of the working class refused for a long while to let him speak, and, when they did at length consent to hear him, kept interrupting in a very hostile manner. Fulanistan was mentioned, so was Russia. But the greatest shock which he received was from such words as 'Landlord!' 'Capitalist!' 'Bloodsucker!' which were hurled at him with horrible insistence. It was forced upon his understanding that these people did not care a jot for his benignant Liberalism, nor for the gifts he offered with a generous hand. Their aim was to abolish wealth and landed property, to drag down King and Lords and Commons and unfetter anarchy. The bitter nature of the heckling scared his soul. He was dismayed to find rough-handed workmen skilful in debate, and full of expert knowledge upon subjects which ought to be known only to the ruling class. Even with the help of all his friends upon the platform, he came off badly, being all aghast.

The press was patriotic; it hushed up an incident which every one who cared for England must of course deplore. But when Sir Limpidus, on his return to London, told the story of his misadventure to a chosen circle of his friends, a man whom he had known for years, a man of property, defended the insurgents upon philosophic grounds, and others present found excuses for them. And Fifi Porter, when he told her of the portent, called it thrilling, and seemed to think the prospect of a revolution festive. What witch's spell was

on the people? Were they mad? His colleagues in the Government agreed with him that something must be done, and done at once, by some one.

Sir Limpidus became quite ill through this anxiety. He had to go into the country for a time and rest his brain, by shooting rabbits in the park at Clearfount.

Suddenly he was recalled to London. There was war in Europe, and England might at any moment be involved in it. How would the people take it? was the question of the hour. Sir Limpidus was of opinion that a war just then would be a godsend. It would rouse the ancient spirit of the people and dispel their madness. They would once more rally to their natural leaders, who, for their part, would throw off the mantle of frivolity. Even defeat as a united nation would be better than ignoble peace with the anarchic mob supreme.

His anxious brow rebuked the irresponsible, like George Carillion who, though nearing fifty, shouted 'Hooray!' at the first hope of war, and hurried off to volunteer for active service. But when he knew that war had been declared, he said: 'Thank God!'